

# CHURCHILL

## THE MAKING OF A HERO

*by*

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16216

I have read a fiery gospel, writ in burnish'd rows of steel :  
"As ye deal with my contemners, so you with my grace shall deal ;  
Let the Hero, born of woman, crush the serpent with his heel,  
Since God is marching on !"

*Julia Ward Howe.*

Success is the result of making many mistakes, and learning from  
experience.

*Winston Churchill.*

What has he done all his life?

*Adolf Hitler.*

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## NOTE

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I regret that exigencies of wartime space do not permit of an index or bibliography.



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## I.

## BOYHOOD AND PARENTAGE

## I.

**M**ORE THAN sixty years ago, a very small boy, of Anglo-American origin, was playing at soldiers. He was not what grown-up people are apt to class as an attractive child. No pretty sayings or winning ways are recorded of him. He was snub-nosed, sandy-haired, and regarded by everyone who knew him as an out-and-out young Turk, the naughtiest little boy ever seen, a generating focus of aggressive energies.

And indeed it was an aggressive age, this of the great Armed Peace, that was to culminate in the world-shattering explosion of 1914. The shadow of that catastrophe was already beginning to darken the European skies. Every country of importance, except peaceful England, resounded with the drums and trappings of vast conscript armies, whose numbers and efficiency were continually being augmented in preparation for the day that could only be postponed, but by no means averted, when a despoiled and intolerably humiliated France should manoeuvre herself into a position for a resettlement of accounts with the great military empire that Bismarck and Moltke had built up in the centre of Europe. Seldom indeed was it that in some part of the world, or even of that swiftly expanding empire of which Britain was just becoming conscious, men were not actively engaged in the business of mutual destruction. Certainly any astrologer must have pronounced the influence of Mars to have been supremely ascendant in those days whose motto was "*Toujours en vedette*".

But if in this, or some other world, there should ever come a day of final reckoning, it may be pronounced that of all these military proceedings, active or preparatory, none were so pregnant with destiny or fraught with tragic significance as those whose field was the nursery floor of the Little Lodge in Phoenix Park, Dublin. For there, and by these, form and direction were being imparted to the mind upon whose adequacy the fate of human civilization, and perhaps of humanity itself, might, at their supreme crisis, come to depend.

Up to very recently, such a statement would have seemed too wildly rhetorical to be taken seriously. But the revolution that is even now taking place in our knowledge of the mind and its hidden springs, has afforded us a different perspective. And even those mighty pioneers of educational science, the Jesuits, were convinced by their own experience that if they could control the first five or

seven years—for the figure is differently quoted—of a child's life, they could let him out of their hands in the assured confidence that the seeds planted would bear such flower and fruit in after years as the gardener had foreseen.

These campaigns and manœuvres await authoritative record. But such pointers as we have are not without value. We know the man-power of the establishment to have been on a truly Continental scale—fifteen-hundred was the ultimate figure, perhaps a record of its kind. Even in so well-to-do a household as that of the Randolph Churchills, only the most insistent and continuous demand could have been good for so vast a supply. The most indulgent of parents do not overload the toy cupboard to this extent from mere vicarious lust of accumulation.

The Winston army remained in being long after the time when most boys have put their soldiers from them as childish things, beneath the dignity of chaps in private, and still more of men in public schools. But even into Harrow days, or rather holidays, that enthusiasm survived undimmed, and the cult of efficiency was pursued with high and unremitted seriousness. The force by that time comprised an infantry division and a cavalry brigade, with an artillery strength of 18 field guns, besides fortress pieces, and complete auxiliary services. Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, one of his father's Fourth Party men, provided funds for the transport service of which his experienced eye had noted a deficiency; while Sir John Wilmoughby, of the Royal Horse Guards, who in after years was to leap into notoriety in connection with the Jameson Raid, volunteered his services as cavalry instructor, and explained how to dispose the brigade in the correct formation of an advanced guard.

But the environment of militarism from which the young Churchill derived his earliest impressions was not bounded by the nursery walls. The illusion of unbreakable peace and security in which the English upper class had sunned itself for generations, no longer prevailed, to anything like the same extent, on the other side of St. George's Channel. Already the ghastly quiescence that had followed the halving of Ireland's population in the Black Famine, was beginning to be broken by the first moves in the campaign of boycott and assassination that was destined, in the fullness of time, to make Catholic Ireland too hot to hold its garrison of English landlords, and to dissolve the bond of union that, thanks to the efforts of Parnell and his henchmen, was rapidly becoming almost as irksome to the larger as to the smaller nation.

Now the Viceregal Lodge, almost in whose shadow the Little Lodge nestled, represented the English headquarters in the undeclared, but mortal, struggle that was in process of development. For there, in awful state, Winston's formidable grandfather, the seventh Duke of Marlborough, held his court as the English Queen's Lord Lieutenant. He had brought along his younger son, Randolph, already in Parliament for the family borough of Woodstock, to serve

as his unpaid Private Secretary. There was danger in the air of Phoenix Park, which, though as yet undefined, could be felt, even in the nursery. There was a constant sense of military preparedness. Riflemen in their sombre uniforms were all about, the most familiar sight on one's daily walks; hardly less familiar the reverberation of their crashing volleys. But there were, according to the infallible authority of Mrs. Everest, the English Nanny, soldiers of an even more sombre complexion, who, though they had never as yet emerged from cover, were always lurking in the background ready to pounce, like the dragon in the garden of an improving book. Fenians was the name by which they were known—a terrible name.

*Toujours en vedette* was a motto that ruled in the purlieus of Dublin Castle no less than on the banks of the Meuse. And here, if anywhere, a scion of the House of Churchill might be imagined capable of hearing from far

Ancestral voices prophesying war.

2.

It is agreed nowadays, that the most important part of a child's environment consists of his parents. And this holds none the less good even when the parents form so fitful a part of it as those of the young Winston. For it is the childish nature to crave for the sort of sheltering affection that only parents can give, and when this, for any cause, falls short of demand, it seeks to compensate itself by readjustments that may determine the whole course of subsequent life. What form these may take will depend on what is born in the blood. A weak nature may develop an ivy-like need of clinging to a stronger for support; but there are others, naturally hard, into whose soul the iron enters, and becomes a tough core of virility. To such, the first and great commandment is "Be hard."

Neither by his own account, nor anyone else's, would it appear otherwise than ridiculous to speak of the child at the Lodge as being in any but the most conventional sense his mother's darling, or the apple of his father's eye. He was not the sort of object on which such sentiment naturally fastens. And they, for their part, were too busy with their joint and respective careers in the greater world, to have much attention to spare for the affairs of the nursery. They had money enough to provide for the ordering of these according to the most approved standards of their time and class. What else were nurses and governesses for? Or money, except to command the labour of others to take off one's own shoulders such irksome but necessary tasks as that, amongst others, of breaking in unmanageable little boys? Even "the sinister figure described as a governess", to quote Winston's own description, must have found an opponent worthy of her steel in a pupil who even at this early age had developed, or inherited, a faculty for defying every sort of authority, and who, on her arrival, was found to have disappeared irretrievably

into the blue, or rather the green of the circumjacent shrubberies, and maintained this strategy of evasion for hours on end.

Lord Randolph Churchill is the last person in the world whom under any circumstances one can imagine playing the part of the conventional daddy, even if his firstborn had been less faithfully moulded in his own image. If there was any soft spot in his disposition, certainly none of the innumerable records of him give the slightest hint of it. Of a class that prided itself on nothing so much as the toughness of its manhood, he was about the toughest specimen. With his compact frame, immaculately tailored, his tilted nose, his eyes bulging from saucer-like sockets, his heavy swell's moustache, the cigarettes that he devoured rather than smoked, his incessant nervous incontinence of speech and movement, he seemed one concentrated mass of cocksparrow aggressiveness. If there was any one word capable of summing up the impression he made on his contemporaries, that word would have been insolence, the peculiarly galling insolence of the aristocrat to whom the idea has never so much as occurred of giving a damn for anybody—"Cheeky Randy", "Grandolph", "Yahoo Churchill", were among the innumerable nicknames on which he thrived. Only of him could the story, related by Ralph Nevill, ever have passed muster, to the effect that in an argument with Joe Chamberlain, on the subject of competitive examinations for the "Indian Civil", he had retorted:

"No doubt people did jobs, but their nominees were at least gentlemen, whereas now we get men from Birmingham and God knows where."\*

Whether he actually said this or not, it is typical of the way he jostled through life, with an utter disregard of anybody else's feelings, or the consequences to himself of affronting them. Like the mythical Irishman at Donnybrook, he struck at every head within range, expecting to get as good as he gave, and never doubting that everybody concerned enjoyed it as much as he did. Some of them no doubt did, and remarkably few bore any lasting grudge against him. He was so palpably without malice, a ragging schoolboy who had never grown up. Even the venerable Gladstone, whom he had plastered for years with the most incredibly brutal shafts of invective, could find it in his heart to forgive him. I know of no more touching example of Christian courtesy than that recorded in one sentence of the son's biography, dealing with that tragic time in which mortal illness was causing the father's mind to wander and his grip on the House to fail. At which time it was observed that the truly Grand Old Man "would always be in his place to pay the greatest attention to his speeches and to reply elaborately to such arguments as he had advanced".†

That was typical no less of Lord Randolph than of Gladstone. Whatever he did, you could not stop people from liking him—certainly not English people, who pride themselves on the qualities

\* *The World of Fashion*, p. 22. † *Lord Randolph Churchill*, Vol. II. p. 472.

they libellously attribute to the gentle bulldog, and whose greatest epithets of commendation are "sportsman" and "gentleman", both of which, according to the standards of the time, fitted Lord Randolph as perfectly as his frock coat. And indeed he showed them as good and as clean sport as W. G. himself, or Fred Archer the jockey. They knew that he would play the game with its full rigour, but they knew at the same time that he would never queer the pitch or take a mean advantage of anyone: that he would always take on the biggest opponent going; and that there was nothing petty or intentionally cruel in the compass of his disposition. As for his pugnacity, they applauded it to the echo, and could never have enough of it.

But it was not only the British public that took this sporting view of Lord Randolph's activities. Their standpoint was equally that of Randolph himself, and the class to which he belonged, that of the nobility and gentry who still religiously hunted and shot over the land that their fathers of the preceding century had exploited with the enthusiasm of agricultural pioneers, and from which, during the early seventies, their agents were still able to raise them the wherewithal for a routine of strenuous and unceasing recreation, by which, in default of a culture now run to muscle, the wolf of ennui could alone be kept from their doors.

Randolph was fortunate or intelligent enough to realize that the political far exceeded the hunting field in its sporting potentialities. Partly, no doubt, this discovery had been forced on him by what amounted to a sentence of exile from that *primum mobile* of the social paradise constituted by the Marlborough House set, presided over by the Prince of Wales, whose august and hypersensitive toes were no more immune from his young Lordship's advances than those of Gladstone or Lord Salisbury. His Royal Highness had fallen out with Randolph's elder brother in the matter of a lady, and Randolph, nothing loth, had taken up the fraternal cudgels, regardless of the fact that it was an unforgivable crime, amounting to social *felo de se*, to cross the Prince's will in the slightest degree. Unforgivable, at anyrate, for a period of years, since even the wrath of Albert Edward was not proof forever against the disarming attractiveness of "cheeky Randy". But the ostracism from enjoyment persisted long enough to drive those restless energies to an outlet in a higher form of sport than those of Cowes, Ascot, or Sandringham.

Randolph Churchill had entered Parliament, in the year of his marriage and Winston's birth, for no other ostensible purpose than that of keeping the Woodstock seat and vote intact for Blenheim Castle and Toryism. But it was the next Parliament, that dominated by the great Liberal majority of 1880, in which he leapt into the full blaze of the political limelight as the leader of a Fourth Party of four men, and as the apostle of a new faith, that of Tory democracy.

To delve for the rational foundations of such faith would be vain labour. They never existed, nor could have. For a foundation im-

plies something fixed and static, whereas Randolph was playing to the score, and his supreme object was to win the game for his side. Whatever professions or slogans might be best suited for getting the Liberals out of office and the Tories, and himself, into it, were politically sound, for that moment. Once in office, it would be time to switch over one's energies to the greatest game of all, that of statesmanship.

It was such an utterly new conception of politics, that it is no wonder that contemporary accounts do little to satisfy the reader's curiosity to know what this Fourth Party business exactly signified. But in the light of our present experience we may find something rather uncomfortably familiar about it. For here were seeds that might, in the fullness of time, and on a more favourable soil than that of England, have borne deadly fruit in the category that we now designate as National Socialist. For it was Randolph's intuition, as it has been that of Hitler and Mussolini, that the way to defeat the politics and ideologies of the Left, from Liberal to Communist, is by combining the forces of reaction with those of the mob in a sort of passionate team drive, using for that purpose every sort of emotional stimulus, patriotic or otherwise, and carefully declining any decision of the issue on a rational plane.

Certainly the tactics that he, and the Fourth Party, sought to introduce into the political contest, were those of Total warfare. Always within the very elastic limits of gentlemanly form, they stuck at nothing and spared nobody, least of all the Conservative Leader of the House, the mild and inoffensive Sir Stafford Northcote, whom they harried, eventually, into the Lords—and the grave. Even patriotic considerations could not divert them a hair's breadth from their course—to close up the Parliamentary ranks behind the Premier in an hour of grave national crisis was, to Lord Randolph, sheer party treason. Openly to incite the Protestants of Ulster, who needed no incitement, to wage civil war, was a brilliant move in the same game. Every little helped.

It was a game brilliantly successful up to the point of dishing Gladstone as opponent and Northcote as leader, and installing Randolph himself in the key position of Chancellor of the Exchequer, with leadership of the Commons in a Tory administration whose Premier, in the Lords, might be trusted to play Hindenburg to his Hitler. But Randolph the sportsman and inspired amateur, was not of the stuff of which Führers were to be made, and Lord Salisbury was no senile figurehead—but resembled nothing so much as his great ancestor, Lord Burleigh, confronting the fragile brilliance of an Essex with his ponderous and calculated inertia.

The young Chancellor, intoxicated with success and at the summit of his popularity, thought no more of riding roughshod over Salisbury's than anybody else's susceptibilities. But there was one very fundamental respect in which he failed to anticipate Totalitarianism. He was vehemently anti-militarist, and in fact the

policy of bold social reform to which he was committed, demanded the cutting down of expenditure on the fighting services below what their chiefs in the Cabinet, and the Premier himself, judged to be the minimum of national safety. Just to bring his chief to his senses, Randolph fired off at him an offer of resignation, with no more notion of its being accepted than of the sky falling. But Salisbury, with what almost amounted to a yawn on paper, informed "my dear Randolph" of "my very profound regret" at this his decision, and proceeded stolidly to fill his place in the Cabinet, intimating to those appalled people who afterwards sought to effect a return, that having got rid of a boil on the neck, one does not try to make it gather again. And that was the political end of Lord Randolph Churchill. He had gone up like a rocket; he came to earth like the stick. One moment he seemed to have the world at his feet; and one false step, one petulant gesture, had delivered him, shorn of his strength, into the hands of the Philistines who had trembled at his nod. He died nine years later, a bitter, disappointed man. It was a tragedy likely to be of profound effect on the son who in so many ways resembled him, and whose most impressionable years its plot comprised.

### 3.

Not the least of Lord Randolph's brilliant achievements, and one that was never to be clouded by subsequent failure was his marriage to the daughter of the Wall Street broker, Leonard Jerome. For it cannot be too clearly realized, or firmly borne in mind, that their son Winston, as far as blood can make him so, is as much American as he is British, and derives no less from the fighting stock of the Jeromes than that of the Churchills.

A fighting stock indeed, but in a very different sphere of combative activity from that of the Ducal House of Marlborough. But the founder of that House had at least this in common with Old Man Jerome, in that he made it his prime care to lay firm and deep its economic foundations. But whereas Marlborough had built on a rock of gold as solid and ponderous as his own palace of Blenheim, the New Yorker had crystallized his successive fortunes out of a material more volatile than quicksilver, and under conditions of feverish activity.

For it would be putting it all too mildly to describe as a vast arena for the Darwinian struggle for survival, the United States during the spate of expansion and exploitation that was barely interrupted by the agony of the great Civil War. Browning's simile of wild cats in a red-hot cage would come nearer to describing a state of things in which colossal fortunes were conjured up almost daily out of nothing by nobodies, and lost as easily. Everybody was feverishly on the make in a stampede for wealth, in which all but the strongest and most fortunate were trodden remorselessly underfoot, and the least inhibition of scruple was a mortal handicap. In such a competition



few of the winners themselves could have told whether unimaginable success—of the only kind they were capable of imagining—had come to them for services genuinely rendered to the community, or from predatory raids on its resources on a scale vastly exceeding those of the pirate kings or robber barons. It at least could be asserted of each and every one of them, that he could by no conceivable favour of the gods have climbed to anything approaching the millionaire level, unless he had been endowed, in the most extreme degree, with the qualities of a fighter—energy, resourcefulness, and a willingness to take all risks.

Mr. Jerome was a fighter in an even more comprehensive sense than that of most of these winners of quick riches. It was not only that he had lost as well as made one or two fortunes before finally making good, but that he had not stopped short of actual physical belligerency. This was when the offices of *The New York Times*, which he owned and edited, and through which he was able to give powerful support to President Lincoln's war policy, were in danger of being wrecked by infuriated pacifists. Nothing loth, Mr. Churchill's grandfather proceeded to arm and mobilize his newspaper staff; and having purchased a battery of cannon, to apply Napoleon's remedy against mob violence with equal success, and not without bloodshed. Nor did the fields of private war, of journalism, and of finance, exhaust Mr. Jerome's energies. He was equally famous as a sportsman, the founder of two great racecourses, and Father of the American Turf.

Now the rise of this new Transatlantic money power was not without its importance, in providing needy aristocratic Houses in Europe with an opportunity of cashing in on their prestige by means of marriage alliances. In England, the upper class had practised this way of strengthening its economic foundations from time immemorial, and never was the need greater than now, on the eve of the great slump in landed property that was bound to be the ultimate effect of free imports and cheap transport. Daughters of American millionaires were already, in the early seventies, glittering prizes in the marriage market, and some of them were no less famed for their beauty than their wealth. Certainly this could have been said of Miss Jeanette Jerome, and it could have been added that her mental endowments were scarcely less remarkable.

This brunette, with the magnolia complexion set off by the raven framework of her hair, and whose undimmed beauty, nearly a quarter of a century after her marriage, is recorded by Sargent in one of the most superb of his portraits, gave the lie direct to the notion propagated by the music-halls and comic papers, of the dollar princess, crude of phrase and manners:

"I shall wear a coronet,  
And be my lady so-and-so on me you bet!"

For Miss Jerome stood on a cultural plane incomparably above that

of a squirearchy which Matthew Arnold, with more excuse than can usually be pleaded for such generalizations, had branded with the stigma of barbarism. Her upbringing had been more cosmopolitan than national; she had been born at Trieste, and up to the age of six had spoken hardly anything but Italian. Her father's wealth and mother's charm had enabled her to skim the cream of European society, and she had completed her education in Paris, where she had been witness of the last splendours of the Tuileries Court under the Second Empire. She attracted the intimacy of the most celebrated men and women of the time, and she herself was fully capable of holding her own, in witty repartee, with all comers.

It was in 1873, when she was the cynosure of all eyes at Cowes Week,—a more select and intimate social function than it was destined afterwards to become—that she crossed the path of Lord Randolph Churchill. He was not the man to let slip such an opportunity, and without a moment's hesitation he let loose the whirlwind assault against which, in the field of love, the defensive *ne plus ultra* has yet to be discovered. They met at a dance; next night he got himself asked to dinner, and she laughingly confided to her sisters that she believed she would end up by marrying him; another 24 hours, and it had ceased to be a joke, for having somehow contrived to lose themselves in the moonlight, on the edge of the Solent, they returned an engaged couple.

There were of course the usual parental complications; the Duke, who little foresaw that an American Duchess was shortly destined to reign in Blenheim itself, recited the customary formulas about young people not knowing their own minds, and this had the effect of reviving the fighting spirit of old Leonard Jerome, who could not brook the idea that the proudest Duke in the land should jib at the prospect of alliance with his family. But even such redoubtable opposition was brushed easily aside by the now combined will-power of these divinely spoilt children. Early next year Jennie had become Lady Randolph; before the year was out Winston was born.

He, with his matchless felicity of phrase, that conveys so much more than it sets down, has described just what she was to him in those early years when the maternal influence counts for so much. "She shone for me like the evening star. I loved her dearly—but at a distance. My nurse was my confidante."

It would be too much to expect of so dazzling a creature as Lady Randolph, that she should have cramped her social style by condescending to the common round of maternal responsibilities. Her masterful genius impelled her to be continually seeking fresh fields to conquer; and after the tragic close of her husband's career, which she had for better and worse supported with passionate loyalty, had set her free to strike out on her own behalf, she became, amongst other things, the editress of a review, the commander of a hospital ship, and the promoter, at Earl's Court Exhibition, of a medieval tournament, with real noblemen poking unconvincingly at prominent

politicians in the lists. And in fullness of time she would be able to throw her influence behind her son's career no less powerfully than she had seconded her husband's.

But in those days, child welfare and child psychology were taken with less deadly seriousness than they are now, and Victorian society women, in spite of romantic illusions about them, bothered far less, on the average, about their usually well-stocked nurseries, than their grand-daughters today.

So that we are to picture the Randolph Churchills going forth into London and Dublin society, and into all the ramifications of political activity, conquering and to conquer, leaving their son and heir to the command of his leaden legions, and the ministrations of such governesses, nurses, spiritual pastors and masters as custom prescribed and money could hire.

Poor lonely little boy! it may perhaps be said of him. But there is no reason to believe that it struck him that way, or does now. No doubt there is a certain type of child whose nature would be fatally warped without some sheltering intimacy of parental contact. But that is not the type likely to be engendered by the blend of two such militant stocks as those of Churchill and Jerome. Such already tough material is likely to be toughened and hardened still more, or, as parents in those days were in the habit of expressing it, knocked into shape—which was what, according to the notions of his time and class, the education of a gentleman ought to do.

And, from the child's point of view, there were certain compensating advantages in such rather cavalier notions of parentage over the unrelenting solicitude that impelled certain other dear papas and mammas to take upon themselves the combined functions of Paul Pry and Jehovah, and in so doing to infect their offspring with the germs of those ineradicable complexes that are the delight of the up-to-date biographer.

Even Lord Randolph, though he seems to have been frankly disappointed with a child who showed no signs of having inherited the parental genius, and who was not in the habit of wrapping up his opinions, had in his composition none of that petty stuff of which domestic tyrants are made, and was the last person to care a tinker's curse whether his son were saved or damned. If there was no tenderness or intimacy to be expected of him, there were probably few actively unpleasant contacts except for an occasional flick of the most cutting tongue in England. Moreover a small boy is quick to discover, and add to his own score, any points of superiority that his parents may possess above those of other boys.

The child is a primitive animal, and it is often possible to get the key to his reactions by studying those of savages. His parents are his gods, a category by no means exclusive of devils. But there are gods and gods, and those who are worshipped with the most fervour are not necessarily those who lie closest about his path and about his bed, or concern themselves most intimately with his affairs. It may set

them even higher in his esteem that they should be strong and splendid and successful, as gods ought to be, at a certain divine distance. The like of Mrs. Everest may be adored as kind, familiar spirits, always at hand to be the partakers of one's joys and griefs; but this does not put them on that divine elevation occupied by the vanquisher of the giant Gladstone, or the Goddess of the Evening Star. It does not lay the foundations of a worship that will survive supreme and unchallenged, long after the primitive phase has been supervened.

4.

Still, one must take the rough with the smooth, and it is idle to pretend that when those whom nature has appointed to be the shepherds of childbirth devolve their charge upon hirelings, the results are calculated to be anything but grievous, or that a heavy burden of suffering can fail to be the portion of the child, who is thus turned loose to take his chance in a world with which he lacks the resources to cope.

There is nothing today that arouses such ready or righteous indignation, as when the child of slum or cottage parents is torn from its home, on some specious pretext, and consigned to the tender mercies of government officials in some remote institution. But a sentence of banishment no less cruel was passed, without the slightest twinge of conscience, by the millionaire's daughter and Duke's son, on their own child of seven. More cruel, indeed, when one learns that tortures were practised on the children in this particular establishment to which the young Winston was consigned, that today would be deemed only credible of a Nazi concentration camp.

And yet they were the last people to be guilty of conscious dereliction of their parental duties, and were, in fact, acting fairly and even generously according to their lights. Winston's intractable disposition no doubt constituted a major nuisance in the home, and strained the available resources almost to breaking point. It is easy to argue that what is for one's own peace of mind is also in one's child's truest interest. Nor did they spare trouble or expense in seeking out the most select establishment that money could procure. It was, as Mr. Churchill himself says, the latest thing in schools, with all the most up-to-date gadgets, even to that wonder of scientific wonders, the new electric light. And it possessed the greatest *cachet* of all in being preparatory for Eton.

It was not for them to know that this admirable institution, like Dotheboys Hall, was under the control of a practising sadist, whose delight it was, whenever he felt like it, to enact, with awful ceremony, bloody and semi-public flagellations upon the bodies of selected children in his charge. If any accounts of these proceedings did filter through to the parents, they would doubtless have reflected, if at all, that in preparing for Eton, one must do as Eton does, and that

such corporal discipline was an essential of the hardening process. Their own withers, so to speak, were unwrung.

One can imagine the life-long blight that such cruelties might have cast on highly strung or hypersensitive temperaments—that of a Cowper, for instance, or a Shelley. But the stories of real life not infrequently give the lie even to the best morals. And there are natures on which, so far as one may be permitted to judge, the hardening process does produce the desired result. But it is rare, even so, to find a spirit not only capable of enduring but, at this tender age, of maintaining active resistance to a tyranny enforced by such terrific sanctions. And the child who, with full foreknowledge of the wrath to come, kicked that brute of a headmaster's hat to pieces for him, was father to the man who, when France had fallen and the whole world expected the *coup de grâce* to follow for Britain, spat—as Hitler subsequently complained—on the German peace offer.

The history of Winston's first schooling would seem to have been that of an unconquerable guerilla, maintained by the ex-war-lord of the nursery against the leagued forces of constituted authority. This, no doubt, was a bar to his deriving much benefit from the expensive curriculum; but it would seem highly problematical whether any knowledge he could possibly have imbibed from that source would have served him half as well as the training he was providing for himself in reacting against it. The farce of memorizing the grammar and syntax of a dead language that, whatever the advantages in the abstract of its acquisition, was never destined to come alive for one pupil in a hundred, was obnoxious to a sense of criticism and even of humour, abnormally developed in a boy of that age. Until he could see the good of it, he was not going to stand for it, and he stuck in his toes doggedly at the bottom of the class. The same principle applied even to the sacred ritual of games, to which he accorded no more than the most perfunctory allegiance. And yet, when he saw occasion for exerting mind or muscle, he was the reverse of a backward boy. His tastes in reading were what would now be called decidedly highbrow; Robert Louis Stevenson had in him one of his earliest fans.

There could, of course, have been no question of expelling a son of the now famous Lord Randolph, even for open mutiny, so that there was nothing for it but to break his spirit with such scourging and affliction as might be necessary. But it was not his spirit that broke; it was his health. A very fashionable Brighton doctor, who numbered the Churchills among his clientele, succeeded in getting the boy of nine removed to a school kept there by two kindly old dames, under whose motherly auspices, and in the Channel air, he gradually made good the ravages of this first, and most exhausting, of his many wars. And here, except for one almost fatal illness, he passed three peaceful and contented years. For these unpretentious guardians had enough sense and sympathy to honour his preference for an intellectual

nourishment more sustaining than the dry bones of dead languages—poetry, history, even French, all of which he greedily absorbed. Nor is there reason to believe that their nerves, or bonnets, suffered to any abnormal degree from their association with this still admittedly, and abnormally, desperate small boy.

5.

The gods that shape the destinies of men and nations could not afford to suspend the process of hardening Winston Churchill longer than absolutely necessary. He must now, in 1887, the year of Queen Victoria's jubilee, quit the peaceful backwater of the Brighton dames' establishment, and launch out upon the turbid waters of a public school career.

It was by no means a foregone conclusion that he would be able to scrape through the entrance examination for Harrow, which was the choice of his father, though himself an Etonian and, according to Lord Rosebery, considered a bit of a "scug" there—a not improbable boyish reaction against nonconformability, that perhaps partly accounts for it. Whatever else the good ladies had accomplished for Winston, they had prudently done less than nothing to break him in to the orthodox routine of what, with unconscious irony, was called the education of a gentleman. He was frankly hopeless in the examination room, because the sort of education that he demanded had little in common with what schools are paid to supply, with the result that he and the examiners were playing a game of cross purposes.

What saved him then was a faculty that endures with uncanny persistence throughout the whole of his career—that of establishing a sort of instinctive rapport with all the most considerable personalities that came within the magnetic field of his own attraction. It would seem as if there were a sort of freemasonry of genius, whose initiates bear some mark by which they are known to each other at sight. And at this time there was reigning at Harrow one of the great headmasters of the nineteenth century, the future Bishop Welldon. He seems to have determined that young Churchill was the sort of investment that Harrow could not afford to let slip on any pretext whatever. And even when the result of an attempt to cope with the Latin paper proved to be one blot and several smudges, he very sensibly decided to call it a pass.

No one who has lived for any time at a University can fail to realize the extent to which certain public schools are capable of impressing a distinctive stamp on the pupils they turn out. And this is so markedly the case with Harrow, that Mr. Herbert's inimitable Topsy, on seeing Iago kill his wife because she argues, remarks "My dear, too Harrovian!" a certain rough-and-toughness of fibre being implied by the adjective. But in the nineteen twenties Topsy was harking back to a tradition that was already passing out of date, and

was at its height in the late Victorian era, enshrined in the famous libel about the Harrow boy, who after the Etonian had asked a lady whether she would take a chair, and the Wykehamist had brought one, instantly sat down in it himself. But the lampoon is double-edged. The Harrovian at least displayed promptness and energy in dealing with a situation to which the Etonian could only react by a polite gesture. To the taunt of "No manners," he might perhaps have retorted with one of "No guts." Anyhow it was of common repute that the Harrow product was characterized less by delicacy of style, than a crude and pushful virility—the quality of the successful, self-made man.

With this Winston Churchill had already showed himself to be richly endowed. His conduct in the matter of his former headmaster's hat was what Topsy would have called too Harrovian for words, and in the congenial surroundings of the Hill he had all the scope he needed for development on lines already predetermined. Although the hardening process was apt to be applied at Harrow with a rigour that even by contemporary standards might have been deemed excessive, it could have no terrors for the veteran of a war of juvenile independence against far greater odds than any against which he was now likely to be pitted. He was among those who are born to act in the capacity not of anvil but of hammer.

All the stories that we have of him go to show that Harrow itself never fathered a type more intransigently Harrovian. Even as a new boy, he seems to have launched out on a career of such full-blooded aggressiveness as hardly any new boy on record has managed, or aspired, to get away with. One genial habit he possessed was that of coming up behind any other boy of comparable size to his own, who might be standing on the edge of the swimming-pool, and precipitating him in. On one famous occasion, that he himself has recorded, he experimented in this way on an entire stranger, who, though deceptively compact of build, turned out to be head of his house and one of the athletic chiefs of the school, by name Amery—a name long after to be linked with his own in a very different connection. It was a situation awful enough to freeze the blood of any average small boy at the bare thought of it. Not so Winston Churchill. Having recovered himself from the pool into which he had been hurled like Vulcan by an indignant Jove, he decided, for once in his life, that a policy of appeasement was called for. But in face of such measureless provocation, the prospect of an accommodation seemed far from rosy, and was not brightened by his pleading the other's deceptive resemblance to a Fourth Form boy. Only the grandest of gestures would now avail. And this incredible new boy, presumably naked, and certainly unashamed,\* came out with words to which he himself bears witness and Mr. Amery has not denied:

\* I am following Mr. Churchill's account. Mr. Amery's puts the date of the apology at "Bill" on the following day.

"My father, who is a great man, is also small."

If we had read this in a school, and particularly a Harrow school story, and had been given to understand that it proved an effective stop to further proceedings, we might have borrowed a phrase from Fuller, to the effect that the author should be more careful how he reported or recorded such improbable absurdities. But there are people in real life whose stories beggar the wildest extravagances of fiction. It is a way they have with them, the way of genius in which we believe because it is incredible.

It has also long been recorded in the legends of Harrow, that he was wont to relieve the boredom, to him, of the football field, by the vociferation of the magnificent, and truly Churchillian battle cry, "Saint George, Saint Dunstan, and the Devil!" a mighty resounding combination, worthy of Cœur de Lion, and which suggests much about the inner workings of his mind, and the twisted and contrasting strands of heroic idealism and something of more dangerous import that must needs be blended in all that is both great and human.

There is a third story, equally revealing, that is told by his cousin, Mr. Shane Leslie, namely how he braved the laughter of the school by publicly embracing his old nurse, Mrs. Everest, when, an ample and only too conspicuous figure in her old-fashioned poke bonnet, she came to visit him.\* For it is only in Totalitarian countries that the process of hardening character must needs be identified with that of brutalizing it. Those who have not lost the tradition of Christian chivalry, are able to rise above the conception of the superman to that of the gentleman; the strong man who is not the slave but the master of his strength. And it is at this time of dawning adolescence that we may look for the first signs of the raw energies of boyhood being sublimated to some nobler end than one of pure egotism.

He was fortunate enough in his reputed capacity of dunce, to occupy, for quite an abnormal time, the bottom position in the school. Fortunate, because this was the means of his coming into a sort of educational windfall. For being considered unfit for the dignity of specialization in the dead languages, he was degraded to an apprenticeship in the use of his own, and, as it happened, under the supervision of a master who was something of a stylistic enthusiast. It was such a training in the elements of authorship as not one in a thousand public schoolboys, however great their potential capacity, could have procured for love or money. And after all, since the days of the Renaissance, it is through the medium of English prose and English verse that literary genius, in these islands, must seek expression—and even then it was possible to be a Shakespeare with little Latin and less Greek, and a Bunyan, in the ensuing century, with none of either. It was under this master that Mr. Churchill assures us, in words that prove what they assert, that he got into his bones "the essential structure of the English sentence—which is a noble thing".

\* *The End of a Chapter*, p. 117. See also *Winston Churchill and Harrow*, p. 45.



The best, and perhaps the only, creditable part of his school work, consisted in his essays, which, as I am told by one of his former masters,\* bore the unique feature of copious illustration, most copious of all when any military event had to be described.

By the time he had left Harrow the seeds of authorship were already beginning to sprout. The association with Amery was enough to procure him a journalistic start in the columns of the *Harrovian*, of which that august boy was editor. Churchill's contributions were robust hard-hitting stuff, and as far as opportunity allowed, what might have been expected over such a signature as "Junius Junior"—subversive of custom and authority.

And indeed the sort of thing that Stalky and Co. brought off in the saga of Kipling's retrospective wish-dream, would seem to have been all in the day's work for Winston Churchill. For it would appear that he, in company with a Stalky called Milbanke, actually did succeed in defying monitorial authority in the most sacrosanct of its functions, the enforcement of compulsory athletics. For with what can only be characterized as the height of cynicism, he unearthed some long-superseded school custom that exempted such earnest students as chose to claim the privilege, from service on the football field during trial week. It was an act of breath-taking audacity, to all outward seeming, but based on so accurate a calculation of the forces at issue as to be almost gambling on a certainty. For if there was one thing more sacred to the mind of the Harrow boy than the ritual of compulsory athletics, it was the authority of school custom. Boys are incurable and even pedantic conservatives. And the monitors, though certainly under no illusions about the real motives of the recusants, knew of no other way than to drop the point, and thus to allow them to set up a minor character of Harrow liberties.

It was no lack of virility,<sup>1</sup> but rather the excess of it, that prompted the young Churchill to such muscular iconoclasm. He had not commenced rebel for nothing, and neither man nor boy was going to drive him along any path that he had not freely chosen for himself, and saw reason for treading. But in one form of bodily exercise, and that which calls for the most exquisite co-ordination of bodily and mental proficiency, he not only excelled, but actually carried off the Public Schools' championship. This was, significantly enough, fencing. Games may be in some sense the image of war, but fencing is war itself, the art of the duel.

The admirable Mr. Welldon had never ceased to back his original fancy, and in fact went so far as to single out Churchill for the rather overwhelming honour of individual tuition, three times a week, for a quarter of an hour before prayers. When a headmaster puts himself to that amount of superfluous trouble for one among hundreds of his boys, he must think he has got hold of something pretty remarkable. A pedagogue of more conventional stamp might, one fears, have been tempted to damn him on the record of his school work, or

\* Mr. H. Y. Oldham, to whom my thanks are due.

idleness, in the rich Tudor of Bishop Latimer, as "naught: an ass-head, a dodipole, a lack-Latin, that doth us no good, nor none will do".

As for Mr. Churchill himself, his riposte to this hypothetical criticism goes as straight to the heart as any thrust of his rapier in quarte or tierce. He describes the whole thirty-six terms of his schooling as the only barren and unhappy period of his life, one in which he had hardly ever been asked to learn anything which seemed of the slightest use or interest, or allowed to play any game which was amusing.

6.

I must ask leave at this stage of our journey to pause for a moment, and glance at one aspect of Winston Churchill that even his most ardent admirers are in the habit of overlooking. Of how many of those who have filled the highest office in the State, and been the master builders of our history, could it be said that if all memory of their actions and policies were blotted out, their names would still live for evermore, and with hardly diminished lustre, in the records of literary genius? On King Alfred's behalf such a claim might plausibly be advanced, and Clarendon survives in his History long after his Code has been dead and damned; while most people will concede that Disraeli, though not in the first rank of novelists as he is of statesmen, ranks high in the second. And that is about all, unless we are to include Mr. Lloyd George's war-time apologia.

But Winston Churchill's place in literature may at the present hour be said to stand on an even securer foundation, if a less conspicuous pedestal, than that which he has achieved in statesmanship. For until the end crowns the statesman's work, judgment on the workmanship must needs remain in suspense. But the author's work springs, like Athene, full armed and mature from the creator's brain—or at least from the press—for his contemporaries, equally with their remotest posterity, to appraise. And even if—which Heaven forbid—the course of our leader should be set for a crash that would bury his political kudos beneath the ruins of our Commonwealth and civilization, he would, in the doubtful event of there being any continuity of culture under the New Order, maintain his place on the shelves of any self-respecting library as the author certainly of two, and probably three, among the classic biographies of English literature. The first of these is that of the author's father; the second that of his great ancestor John, Duke of Marlborough; and the third, already the most voluminous, but still far from completion, that of the author himself.

But to diverge from what must surely rank high among the most gripping adventure stories of all time, into the placid fields of literature, would be to invite the rebuke of Elizabeth:

"To your text, Mr. Dean! We have heard enough of that! To your subject!"

But our subject is after all the making of a hero, and what we mean by that if we look to the heart of the matter, is the making of his soul. However thrilling his vicissitudes or achievements in action, the adventures that count for most in the long run are spiritual, and the form of his career is wrought from within outwards. It must therefore be the aim of the biographer, as it is even of the portraitist, to work from without inwards, that he may place on record those things which, being not seen, partake of eternity.

The few glimpses we have had of the young Churchill's school life might seem to have provided no very obvious pointer to what was beginning to germinate beneath the surface of his mind. His emphatically negative reaction to the scholastic environment shows that though *in*, he was never really *of*, that miniature and artificial world. He did not play up, play up, and play the game that every right-minded public schoolboy is supposed to play, with half the enthusiasm which, during holidays, he put into the marshalling of his soldiers. Nor did even the headmaster's singular and striking faith in him meet with the response it deserved. His heart of hearts was otherwise engaged.

Let us cast back for a moment to hit off this essential line. When we find a boy, hardly yet in his teens, coming out with some ebullition of speech or gesture so wildly improbable as almost to beggar belief, we may suspect it of having forced its way, lava-like, from very far below the surface. "My father, who is a great man, is also small." Grasp the end of this clue, roll it up into a ball, and it will lead without a break to 1906, and the appearance of the first of the three great Churchillian lives, the one of that same father which Rosebery, than whom there can be no weightier judge, has pronounced to be "among the first dozen, and perhaps among the first half dozen, biographies in our language"—in short, a literary classic.

But men like Winston Churchill, even when they produce masterpieces of art, do not do it for art's sake. They are the gate-crashers of Parnassus, and become classics, as you might say, by accident. Men of action, men of the world in the most extreme degree, they are never at peace unless they can be doing something, fighting somebody, and getting somewhere, as a certain unregenerate old skipper used to announce about the hour of his sailing, "D.V. or otherwise." And if, in the course of such proceedings, a masterpiece happens to be born, it can be for no other reason than that the mind is so overcharged with the theme of it, that it must seek this mode of relief. And consequently, we have here, if anywhere, the master key to that knowledge of its inner workings, of which we are in need.

He was just thirty-one when he found time, amid the dust and turmoil of political self-assertion, to give this monumental embodiment to the spirit of filial hero-worship. Such devotion was bound to have had its roots very deep in the past. And if we follow back the line to our starting-point, we shall find overwhelming evidence that this was indeed so.

Thus in 1904, we find Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, who had been intimately acquainted with both father and son, writing of the younger Churchill, that "he is astonishingly like his father in manners and ways and the whole attitude of his mind", and remarking on the touching fidelity with which he continued to espouse his father's cause and his quarrels.\*

But there is no need to labour the point, since no one, and least of all Mr. Churchill himself, is likely to dispute it. Even in his Harrow days he had developed a full-fledged father consciousness, or rather subconsciousness, which had become like a dominant motive in the unfolding symphony of his life "Your father", the inner voice would seem to have told him, "is a very great man; you are your father's son; you therefore . . ."

But such conclusions do not lend themselves to formulation in words. They must be lived to be realized.

## 7.

This all-absorbing hero-worship must seem strange indeed when we consider that no father who ever lived can have put himself to less pains to court or encourage it in a son. The young Winston, as boyhood ripened to adolescence, developed an eagerness that was increasingly urgent for filial contact, but any tentative advance he made was brought up dead against an icy wall of reserve. It was not that the father was actively hostile, or less than positively generous in a material sense. Any illness or accident was an occasion for unlimited outlay on the most famous, or fashionable, specialists, and on one particularly alarming occasion, actually caused Lord Randolph to break off a visit to Ireland and rush with frantic expedition to his son's bedside, bringing along with him—assuredly at nothing less than a pound a mile—the greatest surgeon he could procure. And there were times when he would be as charming and sympathetic to his son as he could even to an opponent when he chose; and it would seem as if the barrier had really fallen. But woe betide any attempt to presume on such appearances!

The new psychology, which may well be in a way to bring our mastery of human into a line with that of material nature, is still amazingly infantile in its assumptions and limited in its outlook. In our most advanced biography and fiction, so far as the two are to be distinguished, it is always the son who has the complex, and it is practically always the same complex. But with the Churchills, it would seem to have been the other way about. The son's reaction to the father was one in which it would defy the genius of Freud himself to diagnose the remotest symptom of an *Œdipus* or any other complex, being just plain, straightforward hero-worship of a kind that Carlyle, or Dickens, or any of their unsophisticated generation, would have understood and applauded. Whereas poor Lord Ran-

\* *My Diaries*, 1888-1914, p. 518.

dolph would really appear to have harboured some suppressed impulse of paternal antagonism that always, when he would fain have unbarred the gateway to his affections, dropped its veto like an invisible portcullis.

We must remember the stage through which he himself was passing, during these years wherein, if all had gone well between father and son, the seeds might have been sown of a friendship both fair and fruitful. It was while Winston was still at the dame's school that the resounding catastrophe had occurred of his father's political suicide. All through his Harrow period the prospect of a resurrection had been receding further and further out of hope. Lord Randolph had become the equivalent of the Greek "citiless man"; an Alcibiades who, having shaken the dust of the Tory Athens off his feet, could not bring himself to seek an asylum in the Liberal Sparta.

One can only guess at the inner workings of that proud spirit during those years of rankling humiliation and disappointment, but he may perhaps have felt it to have been the last drop in the bitter cup he had to drink, that his son and heir, so far from inheriting his own brilliance, should have displayed all the signs of turning out a complete educational failure—a view he did not hesitate to express, on at least one occasion, with something more than the pessimism that is the normal prerogative of parents.

If he had only known it, he himself had played the decisive part in frustrating these gloomy forebodings. The spectacle and inspiration of his own career, even in its last tragic phase, had provided an education incomparably more valuable than that which pedagogues could impart or money buy. It had given direction to energies that would otherwise have run wild, and provided a mould—none the worse perhaps for being enthusiastically idealized—for aspiration. The *Imitatio Randolphi* was already becoming to be for Winston what the Way of Perfection had signified to the devotees of a former age. And perhaps it was the addition of the Jerome to the Churchill stock, that enabled him to start on the quest with a toughness of fibre and staying power far superior to that of his paternal exemplar.

But it was not only thus indirectly that his father's influence was brought to bear. If Lord Randolph, in his haste, had misjudged his son's capabilities, he had equally failed to realize the effect of his own rare and casual interventions in evoking them. But a close examination of the record may result in something more than a suggestion that the two main streams of that son's achievement, the one of the sword and the other of the pen, can be traced to him as to their source. For the gift of *Treasure Island*, that had awakened in the otherwise backward child a precocious, and permanent, taste for great literature, was that of his father.

And it was his father's hand that grasped the other guiding thread of his childish life and, as it were, linked it up with the cord of steel that was to vertebrate the whole of his subsequent existence. The earnest and prophetic delight that he took in his toy soldiers had

persisted, as we have seen, well on into his Harrow days. And it so happened that one day when the entire force was mobilized and deployed in attacking formation, his father should have dropped in for what proved a historic visit of inspection. For instead of doing the thing that might almost certainly have been expected of him, and acquainting Winston, in a way not to be forgotten, with the paternal opinion of such babyish survivals, he took the proceedings with as much seriousness as if he had been debating with Gladstone across the floor of the Commons. For no less than twenty minutes the two descendants of Marlborough remained in absorbed and delighted contemplation of the scene, and then, with a characteristic flash of decision, the father turned to the son:

"Would you like to go into the army?"

The answer was in the affirmative.

There was dwelling, at this time, far away by the upper waters of the Danube, the little son of an Austrian customs' official, who perhaps at this same moment may also have been playing with soldiers. Is it not just conceivable that he may have experienced a momentary shudder, of the kind that children call gooseflesh?

## 8.

It was easy to say, but by no means certain that the intention could be carried into effect. For even the British army of those days exacted a certain minimum of intellectual qualification from those who aspired to commissioned rank, and that by the test of examination marks. But the utmost that Welldon and his ushers had been able to drive into Churchill's skull during all the years of his Harrow schooling, had done little, or nothing, to cure his obstinate inability to furnish any sort of effective answer to a printed sheet of questions, on any subject towards which he did not happen to be personally inclined. The result was that two successive assaults on the approaches to Sandhurst ended in complete repulse.

Fortunately for him, and for us, this was an impasse in which the power of money might be used to compensate for almost any lack of relevant ability. The antidote to the examination system was supplied by species of educational parasites called crammers, who existed for no other purpose than that of reducing it to a farce, by imparting knowledge, not of the kind required, but of the mere mechanical trick of circumventing some particular set of examiners, by a parrot-like reproduction of answers to certain questions, of a sort which an intensive study of past papers had enabled them to anticipate, with something approaching certainty. The most celebrated of all this fraternity was a certain retired Captain, who was reputed to be able to convert any youth short of an actual cretin into a budding cadet. And at the third and final try he succeeded in accomplishing this feat with Winston Churchill. Even he must have glowed with a special pride at this supreme vindication of his method.

It was, to be sure, not a brilliant pass, for Churchill had failed to

qualify for the infantry, thus frustrating his father's purpose of placing him in that very superior unit, the 60th Rifles, into which its Colonel-in-Chief, the Duke of Cambridge, had graciously signified his willingness to receive him. So to Lord Randolph's far from speechless indignation, he was graded on the lowest intellectual level that qualified for admission to the cavalry. It might have been pleaded in extenuation that he was suffering from the effects of the accident already referred to—the result of a daredevil escapade equal to any recorded of Squire Mytton. For, on a visit to Bournemouth, he had allowed a couple of younger boys to chase, and finally corner him on a narrow bridge spanning one of those miniature gorges, or chînes, that are found on this part of the coast. Rather than “cry capevi”, he preferred to take a leap into space for the top of a young fir tree, on the chance of its breaking his fall. But it was the branch, and not the fall, that was broken. The result of the nearly 30 feet sheer drop was three days' unconsciousness, and a complication of injuries which a perfect army of specialists and his own indomitable will only just prevented from effecting his quietus. Some old-fashioned people might have seen in this episode more conclusive proof of fitness for the career of a *beau sabreur* than the examination room could have supplied.

Still, the long months of invalidism were drawing to a close, the approaches to Sandhurst were forced, and now for the first time Winston Churchill was provided with a main outlet for his still overflowing energies, that was not actively uncongenial. We hear no more of his lead soldiers, since he had now become part of a game of real soldiers. It was still only a game, since all peace-time soldiering is but a make-believe of the real thing, and it was a matter of frank regret to him that the real thing seemed never destined to materialize, except in the form of what amounted to little more than glorified police-work incidental to the process of imperial expansion. Still here he was, clad in Her Majesty's uniform, perfecting himself in the elements of military technique, and greedily devouring such books of military science as a free order on his father's bookseller enabled him to procure. He was happy in this employment as he had never been at school, and ceasing to be a fish out of water he ceased also to be a dunce. It was no longer a question of scraping out, as he had scraped in, by the skin of his teeth—at the end of his third term he passed with flying colours, eighth of his batch.

All the same, it may be doubted whether the routine of the Military College provided him with that full satisfaction to which he must have looked forward as the result of being safely launched on a military career. It was all too narrow a cage to give space to an imaginative genius that was already becoming conscious of power in its wings like that of a young eagle. After all, the view that the Sandhurst authorities took of their educational functions did not differ so markedly from that of the public schools, except in being more uncompromisingly repressive. The cadet was not regarded as

the field marshal in the germ, a bringer to Her Majesty's Service of individual talents that it was all-important to discover as soon, and develop as intensively as possible; but rather as a base vessel to be purged of original sin, a young cub to be licked into shape and subdued to a habit of unthinking obedience. It was interesting no doubt to be instructed in those elements of practical field work, to whose mastery Napoleon himself attributed no small part of his success—and Winston Churchill has all his life been a man of his hands. But it was otherwise with that fetish of the old-fashioned orthodoxy, close-order drill. With this he was frankly bored, and the effect of boredom was always the same upon him, so that we are not surprised to find him as obstinately stuck in the awkward squad, as he had been at the bottom of Harrow School. And it is possible to divine beneath the cheerful account that he gives of his Sandhurst days, a faint undercurrent of something that might almost be called disillusionment. His occasional visits to the neighbouring Staff-College awakened yearnings after a military knowledge of wider scope than any that was considered appropriate to the intelligence of a cadet, though it was the sort of thing in which he had been steeping his mind for years through the means of his toy command, and perhaps—though this is only a very probable guess,—by what he had already begun to derive from consciousness of the Marlborough tradition. A very penetrating observer might, perhaps, already have begun to wonder how long the British army would be big enough to hold him.

Even now, the most important part of his education was not that which came to him through official channels. The year of enforced quiescence that had followed his accident had been a blessing in disguise, in that he had been prevented from pouring out all his energies in a riot of physical strenuousness. He was driven to seek for mental in default of muscular satisfaction, at a time when opportunity, the like of which comes to few, if any, youths of his age, had begun to present itself. For his father, though a hard, was a reasonable man, and he saw that his son had arrived at an age at which he was no longer to be treated as a child, and at which he might well commence his initiation into those mysteries of the high political circle in which he himself continued to shine, though with clouded beams, as a luminary of the first magnitude. And the mother, as bright and brilliant as ever, and with the ramifications of her influence extending throughout the whole field of political society, had been quicker than her husband to perceive the first signs of budding genius beneath her son's somewhat unpromising exterior, and gave him the benefit of her unrivalled inside knowledge of a political game that was still almost as gentlemanly and exclusive as polo.

He made contact with all the leading personalities in that game, men whose names were in everyone's mouth, and whose performances were followed with breathless interest by a public that appreciated even high statesmanship in terms of sport. He was taken to the gallery of the Commons, and watched the leaders contending



like heroes in the *Iliad*, while the House rocked and swayed with gusts of conflicting emotion; he saw the venerable and now almost legendary Gladstone launched on the full tide of his eloquence, and towering above friend and foe with majestic dominance, in spite of his eighty-four years. And he saw what was hidden from the public eyes, how champions, who had stood front to front in apparently mortal combat, could put aside their hostilities at a moment's notice, and mix and mingle in the easy urbanity of social intercourse.

Most valuable of all, the father now permitted the son to accompany him on visits or to social functions, and would even, on occasion, impart to him the fruits of his political experience, with entire candour and all his inimitable charm. But there was still that invisible barrier defeating every effort to put their relationship on anything like a footing of intimacy, and on one occasion when Winston made a tentative offer to help his father with secretarial work, he got as frigid a snub as Queen Victoria knew how to administer to *her* eldest son under like circumstances. And yet one cannot help feeling that Lord Randolph would have ended the impasse almost as gladly as his son—if he had known how to inhibit his own inhibitions, or even, perhaps, to understand them.

The autobiography records one occasion in which the mask of stubborn pride was lifted for a moment to reveal what he would have died rather than show to the world. It was at the end of the Harrow period, when Winston had caused a nervous outburst of more than common vehemence by firing off a gun too near the father's window, and when the sight of his distress had produced a revulsion in which the starved affections were for once allowed a vent, and which ended in an appeal to him to make allowances for one whose every action was misjudged and every word distorted . . . but it must be read in the original, which is one of the high lights of literature, for its full pathos to be appreciated.

It was from such scenes and such experiences that Winston Churchill was, even in his Sandhurst days, deriving what may be accounted the better, or at least the profounder, half of his education. There was something about him that was already beginning to mark him as different from the common run of cadets, something that any casual incident might reveal, and that might cast a gleam of historic significance even on so commonplace an episode as a music-hall rag.

## 9.

The Empire in Leicester Square was, during these Roaring 'Nineties, no less typical a product of British expansiveness than that other Empire on which the sun never set. In the perspective of a good many Sandhurst cadets it may have counted for rather more, since they were constantly in it, whenever they could get a spot of leave, and occasionally thrown out of it. It was a noble, if somewhat meaty, fare that was provided for them by a galaxy of entertaining

geniuses the like of which Hollywood and the flicks have long put out of date. But there was another sort of entertainment on offer on the promenade behind the auditorium, that was crowded with members of the oldest profession on earth, and the one most ardently patronized in contemporary London, who, poor things, needed, no less than any other purveyors, a market for their wares. They were in an unfortunate position, since the high requirements of contemporary morality had converted what would have been a straightforward adjustment of demand to supply, into a gigantic and multiple racket of which they were the victims, since all but the barest moiety of their takings was raked off by pimps, landladies, policemen, publicans, and of course, box offices. Morally speaking, this method of fining sin was no doubt the next best thing to abolishing it, and it was entirely consistent to ban plays like *Mrs. Warren's Profession* that threatened to expose and discourage the system.

But so liberal a view was not universal, even in the 'nineties. There was a certain Mrs. Ormiston Chant, one of those intensely earnest women who were coming into the limelight at this time, and who were the forerunners of female emancipation. Being entirely without a sense of humour, she could detect no source of fun, though only too much of profit, in the spectacle of these crowds of exploited women, and her membership of the London County Council put her in an excellent position for launching a crusade, which was so far successful in attracting publicity as to compel that body to exert its authority, to the extent of exacting from the Empire, as a condition of its licence, that the promenade should be duly fitted with seats, and separated from the bar. This naturally kindled the fires of public indignation, since even as it was, the management was only just able to make ends meet with a dividend of round about 85 per cent, and this was fanned into a blaze when it was announced that the Dear Old Empire was forced to close its doors; strong men in the audience diluted their breath with tears when the curtain was lifted, after the final farewell, on the entire company and staff, though by some curious omission, not the shareholders, thrown out upon the cold, cold world.

But it was not so bad as all that. The great spirit of British compromise was brought into play, and morals (though not perhaps Mrs. Ormiston Chant) were satisfied by the erection of a flimsy partition, provided with liberal means of access, between the promenade and the bar. And so in a few days, company, staff, audience, and last, but not least, the ladies of the promenade, were all back in full strength for the joyous resurrection of their Dear Old Empire, amid scenes of delirious enthusiasm. Perhaps too delirious, for the bar, though hidden, was not inaccessible, and a goodly part of the audience were no doubt in a condition that responds readily to emotional stimulus. And the sight of that accursed partition was too much for men, and boys, with the spirit of Hampden in their blood. Tentative prods were assayed with ferrules that penetrated the

flimsy material as if it were paper. The suggestion proved irresistible. The supporters of the Dear Old Empire, some three hundred strong, surged forward in one united rush on its property.

Wednesday was a half-holiday at Sandhurst, and it was only natural that so sensational an event as this re-opening should have attracted to the Empire a strong contingent of cadets; equally natural that they should have felt that they would not be getting their money's worth out of the entertainment without some even stronger form of excitement than that billed in the programme. Young men will break loose and run riot as the sparks fly upwards, and the ragging impulse was as normal in the 'nineties as it is now. But such an affair may assume a different complexion when there is a Winston Churchill to exploit its possibilities. He had viewed the proceedings of Mrs. Chant and her fellow councillors in the light of a major violation of those liberties consecrated at Runnymede. He had not the least doubt that he was the man to vindicate them, and he planned his campaign with as much deliberation as Marlborough might have done. He had discovered the existence of a League for Theatrical Protection, and he had come up to Town primed with a carefully prepared oration, to attend what was advertised as the meeting of its executive. That body had proved to comprise one disconsolate individual in a dingy room, and in speechless disgust the young crusader had returned to his base, pawning his watch for the ticket. He was, however, at the scene of action on Wednesday night, and though he does not appear to have had any responsibility for the assault on the partition, he grasped, with the lightning decision of the born cavalry leader, the opportunity for turning a vulgar brawl into an event of high political significance. Making the wreckage his rostrum, he began to harangue the excited mob in words that might have emanated from Gladstone himself:

"You have seen us tear down these barricades tonight; see that you pull down those who are responsible for them at the coming election."

No wonder that they cheered themselves hoarse and rushed forth into the street waving in triumph the souvenirs of their victory. It was a political debut not unworthy of one who was to prove capable of infusing whole peoples with the determination "to pull down those responsible" for violations of liberty of a different kind from any attempted by poor Mrs. Ormiston Chant.\*

#### 10.

But it is time to strike a very different note from this one of high comedy. We have seen to what an extent Winston Churchill had come to mould himself in the image and identify his own career, with that of his father. He shared, beyond doubt, in Lord Randolph's

\* There is an excellent account of this by Mr. Horace Wyndham in his *Victorian Parade*.

resentment against that Olympian clique that had thrust him forth into political exile, and had severed the connection between democracy and Toryism. He too must have realized what it meant when Lord Salisbury put the seal on the Cecil domination, by appointing his nephew, Arthur Balfour, once the philosophic brains of the now defunct Fourth Party, to that leadership of the Commons which Randolph himself had discharged so briefly and so brilliantly.

But it was not to be believed, and the young Winston would certainly have spurned the notion, that his father with all his powers intact, and his popularity with the common people apparent wherever he went, could be kept from rising to even greater heights than that from which he had fallen. The Tories themselves, now that Gladstone was again in the ascendant and the Home Rule struggle had entered upon its most critical phase, had more need than ever of the one man capable of meeting him in debate on something like equal terms.

But the shadow of another and grimmer tragedy was impending. It began to be suspected, and then something more than suspected, that all was not well with Lord Randolph. He had contracted a mortal disease, a creeping paralysis that laid its grip on the mind and destroyed it, cell by cell, leaving the bodily semblance unchanged. There is mercifully no need to dwell on a spectacle too agonizing to contemplate, even in retrospect, and culminating in a horror surpassing anything dreamed of by Poe or Webster, that of the final journey on which he set forth round the world, accompanied by his devoted wife—and a leaden coffin.\* The coffin returned and the body; but this still breathed, and moved, and presented a ghastly caricature of the once-spoiled darling of fortune—cheeky, brilliant Randy.

The end could not come too soon—if it was indeed the end. For one has seen a tree fallen by the wayside, with another tree, springing from the trunk, tall and magnificent above its ruin.

## II.

### THE SOLDIER

#### I.

IT WAS the 24th of January, 1895, that Lord Randolph Churchill died. Almost immediately afterwards his son, Winston, went to join the 4th Hussars, at Aldershot, in anticipation of the commission to which he was shortly to be gazetted.

He was very far from sharing his father's disappointment at his relegation to the cavalry. He was after all a young fellow abounding with the joy and sap of life, and with nothing abnormal about him

\* Shane Leslie, *op cit.*, p. 112.

except the excess of his virility. There are certain psychologists who maintain that every human being is, mentally speaking, not of one sex, but both, compounded in different proportions in each individual. If that is so, we must surely put Winston Churchill, like his father, at the extreme masculine end of the scale, since the feminine part of him is too small to be detected by any means at our disposal. He is, and always has been, overwhelmingly a man's man; an adventurer and a thruster, of whom it might almost be said that he is never at peace unless he is in action. And to such a one, the career in a crack cavalry regiment offered scope for his manly energies in the noblest forms of enjoyment, amid surroundings of splendour and aristocratic affluence. As a gay hussar, he would command a social prestige immeasurably superior to that of the common linesman, and something more than mere prestige—for it was notorious that upon such picked units the favours of authority were more liberally bestowed than on the ordinary ruck of the service.

In the cavalry arm, a commission had come to signify less membership of a profession than that of a highly select club, to which none but a very rich man's son could afford to belong, and which was patronized for the sake of the life. It was a life that offered the highest satisfaction possible to the tastes cultivated in what Mrs. Hemans had called the "stately homes of England". For it was founded upon the cult and companionship of that noble animal, the horse, and so intimate was the liaison with the hunting field, that almost unlimited leave could be obtained for a form of sport which was not unplausibly regarded as the best school of training for young officers. No less enthusiastic was the devotion of the typical cavalry subaltern to polo, the most thrilling of all ball and goal games, but one that added to the expense of maintaining a charger and perhaps one or two hunters, that of a string of ponies. Towards the cost of living up to these and similar requirements the pay of a junior officer contributed no more than a fractional subsidy.

A truly magnificent existence, but one that had all too little reference to the realities of modern war. Yet it was not unnatural that they who paid the piper should want to call the tune. They had their own immemorial tradition of what cavalry ought to do, and they did it surpassingly well. Their feats of spectacular horsemanship in the Long Valley of Aldershot, changing formation at break-neck speed, or enacting the gallop past on review days, with their gorgeous uniforms and flashing accoutrements, ranked as a spectacle above anything that even the great Mr. Barnum, with all his hosts of trained circus performers, could offer to the public. But it might prove a spectacle of a different kind when weapons of precision were brought to bear on it.

It is notorious that for this sort of life, intellectual pre-occupations were regarded rather with suspicion than favour. To ride straight at a fence or an enemy, to excel in the kindred arts of managing horses and troopers, to sustain the credit of the regiment by all that

could be comprehended in the notion of smartness, on or off parade—these were gifts not to be easily acquired, but once acquired, sufficient. The callow subaltern who, when he might be out in the open air, or even partaking with his brother officers in such relaxation as they (though not perhaps Mrs. Ormiston Chant) might prescribe as the proper complement to such activities, spent his time fugging indoors with fat tomes, probably by Germans, on military theory, or in the study of what, at public schools, was branded as “stinks”, would need to be a conspicuously good fellow and efficient sportsman not to be put down—perhaps in the painfully literal sense of the horse-trough—as an outsider and a prig. Indeed, so inviolate was the cult of genteel amateurishness, that professional topics, or “shop”, were Draconically tabooed in conversation off parade.

And so it came about that the most admired units, and those which provided the easiest ladder to high command, were those in which intellectual aspirations were most sternly discouraged, and military knowledge at the greatest discount. The results of such amateur control had been seen in the Crimea—they would be seen again.

Now the 4th were counted among the very cream of crack regiments, though not perhaps quite on the supreme eminence of the 10th, or the Life Guards. But there could be no doubt of their Colonel, Brabazon, providing in his own person the undiluted essence, and quintessence, of what we may perhaps be allowed to designate as “crackness”. He was, not without reason, the most-talked-of character in the army, and to describe him as Gilbertian would be a palpable understatement, since nothing that Gilbert could, or dared, attribute to his heavy dragoon officers in *Patience*, could hold a candle to the extravagances of speech and conduct habitually recorded of him. Though a superb horseman and drill-master, who might have proved not inferior to Murat himself as a practical exponent of cavalry shock tactics, what occupied his mind more than anything else, and constituted for him the supreme test of fitness in an officer, was comprised in the word “dwess”—for it was one of his many affectations not to be able to pronounce the letter R. He was, in fact, the last, though by no means the least, of the great race of dandies that had attained the zenith in D’Orsay and Brummell. You might as well have expected to meet him, off parade, minus his trousers, as the frock coat that no tailor’s dummy could rival in the perfection of its fit.

It is no wonder that with these qualifications he should have been the recipient of the most intimate condescensions from the heir to the Throne, who himself probably knew and cared more than any other of his prospective subjects about the detailed observance of sartorial orthodoxy. To him, the Colonel was “Brab” to his face—to the army, he was “Bwab” behind his back.

“Bwab” is the hero of as many legends in the service as Oscar Browning at Cambridge, principally concerned with his dandy’s pose

of being too bored and lackadaisical to excite himself about anything mundane. If he missed his train, he would languidly command the station-master to "bwing another", and when constrained to stoop to an infantry command, he protested to enquirers that he could never "wemember numbers", but that they had "gween facings" and you got at them from Waterloo. The most famous of all the stories about him is that of his once having committed the *lèse majesté* involved in querying, at the War Office, a rather arbitrary decision of Sir Evelyn Wood, another fanatical cavalry enthusiast, then invested with the Aldershot command. Sir Evelyn hit upon a truly horrific mode of revenge. For "Bwab's" most cherished idiosyncrasy had consisted in a little goatee tuft which he, like Lord Roberts, sported beneath his moustache—a thing which, though against the strict letter of the Queen's Regulations, no one had ever dreamed of questioning, until Sir Evelyn launched, like heaven's amazing thunder, a peremptory order to the unhappy Colonel to appear on parade properly shaved. And though he would have certainly sacrificed his head with greater equanimity, shorn and shamed he appeared before his regiment next morning. Which, though it will probably rank with posterity as the most memorable achievement of Sir Evelyn's career, would seem to indicate that "conduct worthy of an officer and gentleman" was susceptible of an elastic interpretation in high quarters. Not that "Bwab" was incapable of paying his own scores by methods equally drastic, when occasion offered.

Anyone who wants to savour the choicest Brabazonian vintage has only to disinter from its cobwebs the record of his evidence before the commission on the South African War, in the course of which, of all outrageous misfits, he had been appointed to the command of infantry on horseback, in the shape of yeomanry. The fine old veteran's faith in his beloved *arme blanche* had been vindicated to his entire satisfaction by the fact that the Boers had never dared to face it in the open, "You understand, what we call the open—in the field, never; but they stood with their ponies at the bottom of the Kopjes and shot us down. . . . While we, perhaps, never saw them"—too irregular! And for the yeomanry he had thought up the bright idea of equipping them with an *arme blanche* of their own in the shape of tomahawks. Chargers, after all, were meant to charge with.

But for all his extravagances, he was an able man in his reactionary way, and had enough shrewdness to perceive what an asset young Churchill was likely to prove to his "wegiment". Even from Sandhurst, he had had him frequently over to dine at the mess, and, as Lord Randolph complained, set himself to turn the boy's head. Not that it needed much turning in that particular direction. Winston was now, as he has remained all his life, a devotee of horses and horsemanship, and perhaps it was one of the results of his toy soldier-ship that he should have acquired a love of the splendour and pageantry that still invested the peace-time profession of arms. And where was there more scope for these tastes than in a Hussar unit?

A young fellow who has succeeded in starting manhood with the career that has been the ideal of his boyish imagination, may be excused if he feels himself securely on top of the world, and settles down to make the most of his good luck in the broad and pleasant way that has opened before him and is followed without question by all the other members of that jealously exclusive little family into which he has been received, and whose unwritten law is that the uniform they wear shall be but the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual conformity to pattern.

One must never forget to what an extent these distinguished regiments constituted a law unto themselves. Theirs was not the professional half so much as the club spirit. They very naturally felt that, since they maintained themselves so largely at their own expense, and contributed out of their own funds to the maintenance of the regiment in that luxuriant splendour of which the country was so proud, they had almost as much a right to be masters unto their own house, as those free companies and bands of condottieri whose services were formerly priced at such a high value, and who might be said to have patronized as much as served their fortunate employers. The result was that there was an unwritten law of the regiment that weighed more heavily on the newly joined subaltern than that formulated in Queen's Regulations, one that had its own sanctions and even its own tribunal—that of the subalterns' court martial. It was a logical point of view that if you chose to join a club, you had either got to do, and be, what the rules prescribed, or else get out; and that if you did not get out voluntarily, things would be made too hot for you. You had only got to do and be like everyone else, and all would be well with you in the most desirable of all possible existences. Otherwise . . .

Thus, when we find a subaltern of scarcely half a year's standing showing, in the clearest possible way, his intention of following his own individual bent in pushing a career for himself, we feel almost as if we had read of some novice, in a monastery of old Spain, flaunting the right of private judgment in matters of faith. This, in itself, would call for no special comment, except that any young fool with a swelled head is free to run it into a brick wall. But when we find the subaltern in question metaphorically butting the wall down, or, in other words, asserting himself not only with the most uncompromising defiance of all precedent and convention, but also without any perceptibly untoward consequences, we may assure ourselves that we are in the presence of a uniquely forceful personality, one of whom it may be said:

There's not any law  
Exceeds his knowledge, neither is it lawful  
That he should stoop to any other law.

Thus we find Churchill enjoying with all the vigour of his Gar-



gantuan appetite such satisfactions as life in a crack regiment had to offer, though without that self-effacement in the regimental team spirit, which is the first commandment of its unwritten law. He himself, in his refreshingly frank and humorous account, does not make the least pretence of having observed the conformist taboo on what in public-school parlance is called "side". When he carried this to the heroic length of arriving, and keeping the Prince of Wales, half an hour late for dinner, he ruefully admits having realized that he must be "punctual, subdued, reserved, in short display all the qualities with which I am least endowed". The lack of them would appear to have irked him singularly little, to judge from his account of what, to any other officer of his status, would have been the overwhelming experience of being asked, on his arrival in India, to dine with the Governor of Bombay:

"I have forgotten", he says, "the particular points of British and Indian affairs on which he sought my counsel; all I can remember is that I responded generously. There were indeed moments when he seemed willing to impart his own views; but I thought it would be ungracious to put him to so much trouble, and he very soon subsided."

This is only another example of Mr. Churchill's lifelong ability to assert his own personality, and carry it off, in a manner and under circumstances that would be past belief in any other mortal. There are some people whom it is no good trying to suppress, because, like a certain type of Japanese dolls, however hard you throw them down, they instantly return to an upright position. In time it almost comes to be expected of them—as if by a sort of special licence that they have bluffed the rest of the world into conceding. And Winston seems to have inherited "cheeky Randy's" gift of being able to take the most outrageous apparent liberties without giving offence. After all, one can turn a blind eye to a good deal of side in a young officer who is as hard as nails, sits his horse like a centaur, is conspicuously efficient at all regimental duties, afraid of nothing and nobody, an irrepressibly stimulating companion, and most important of all, with the makings of a champion polo player—the kind of fellow to carry the regimental team on his shoulders to victory.

Account for it as we may, all the evidence goes to show that from the first moment of his joining the 4th, Winston made it quite clear that he was going to conform to nobody's pattern but his own, and moreover that the 4th made no serious, or at any rate successful, attempt to challenge his right to do so. Which, if we grant it to be true, is a fairly unique event of regimental history.

But though his brother officers would appear to have afforded him every facility for getting, on his own terms, the best that regimental life had to offer, many months had not passed before he had begun to chafe for wider fields for the expansion of his personality. The sort of thing one did at Aldershot, though thrilling enough in its way, was after all not the real thing, nor even a very convincing

imitation of it. Even as a game, it lacked the supreme excitement of polo. It was not for that, that he had taken up the profession of a warrior, and it was not on the parade ground, or even on field days, that his ancestor Marlborough had laid the foundations of his career, but by pushing himself into active service no matter where or under whose flag, so long as an enemy could be found obliging enough to shoot, stab, or otherwise seek to compass his destruction.

Leave in the Hussars was generous. Towards the end of the year, the weary subaltern could look forward to two and a half clear months of undiluted enjoyment, which was as good as to say hunting. Even to so unorthodox a character as Winston Churchill, this would have held good, but for one very fortunate circumstance. It was beyond his financial scope. He had spent every penny he could raise on polo ponies; and hunters, not to speak of the lavish expense incidental to their employment with the only sort of pack he would have dreamed of patronizing, were out of the question. For, as Lord Randolph had realized, the family resources were not equal to providing the sort of allowance that was really required to live up to a Hussar standard of life. Winston would be, for a cavalry man, a bit out at elbows—unless he could find means of raising the wind for himself.

So we find him racing across the Atlantic, on this first leave of his, intent on killing both birds with one stone. He would make leave pay, by accepting a modest commission as a journalist, and he would see a bit of real soldiering by putting himself up as a target for the only enemy anywhere in the world likely to have a shot at him. This was in Cuba, where the local inhabitants were engaged in a guerilla war of independence against the forces of the Spanish monarchy, who marched helplessly about from place to place, while their opponents retired into the tropical vegetation, and took toll of them by sniping. It was not a very heroic or spectacular sort of war, but besides offering a by no means negligible chance of stopping a bullet, it might well prove an educational godsend.

For it had the effect, at this very critical formative stage, of taking him right out of such a windowless corridor as life in his British regiment, and presenting him with a fragment of history in the making, amid scenery and among men different from anything that even his imagination could have conceived. Nor was his role that of a passive spectator. His extraordinary faculty of impressing himself upon people was never more in evidence than with the polite Spaniards, who, from the Field Marshal Commander-in-Chief downwards, joined in treating him as a personage of immense importance, charged with a weighty mission from Her Majesty's Government. No one was better fitted to appreciate that both in the face of the enemy, and in the reciprocity of soldierly comradeship, he stood, in the critical appraisal of these foreigners, for his country—her honour was his responsibility. He was debarred by no shyness from assuming it.

There was another lesson to be applied, of which he may have already got some inkling on the polo ground. It was this; in the game of life, it is not enough to lie up and wait for the pass to come to you; the great player is he who can thrust himself into the *mêlée*, and make his own opportunity. The genteel self-effacement and conformability that are the virtues of the perfect subaltern, are not the qualities by which outstanding careers have ever been achieved. If you set out to suppress yourself, you cannot complain if you succeed. Winston Churchill had no illusions on the subject. He was a careerist in the sense that Cæsar and Chatham, that Marlborough and Lord Randolph and old Leonard Jerome had been careerists before him. He was not half a New Yorker for nothing. He was going to thrust his way to the front, availing himself of every means that offered, and especially of those advantages of pull and influence that his parentage enabled him to command. He would never have been able to manage this Cuban jaunt unless he had been able to get his father's, and his own, old friend, Sir Henry Drummond Wolff, then Ambassador at Madrid, to wangle it for him. It was his first experiment in a technique of which he was soon to prove himself a master.

The Cuban holiday ran its course according to plan. Lieutenant Churchill had all the fun that he wanted on the march with a Spanish column, including that of a bullet that whizzed quite close enough past his head to give him the satisfaction of having been well and truly under fire.

### 3.

It was in the spring of the following year, 1896, that the 4th. Hussars were transferred from Aldershot to the great military centre of Bangalore, in the Madras Province of Southern India. And here, in the normal course of things, Churchill might have looked to spending the next dozen or so years of his professional life, while he rose with automatic gradualness up the moving stair of seniority, basking meanwhile in the enjoyment of what, to most people in his position, constituted the most desirable life on earth. Bangalore itself was one of the most sought after stations in India. It was a huge, straggling town that you never seemed able to get properly out of, but it had a climate that if it was a little muggy and relaxing, was never unbearably hot, and it had an extensive cantonment provided with every possible amenity for the sort of life that the Englishman in India, and still more the Englishwoman, most desires to live. It is a life that must be experienced, for its nature to be appreciated. For these little white communities, dotted about in the midst of a civilization more venerable than their own, and surroundings as picturesque and historic as any on earth, had made a fine art of isolating themselves in the closed compartment of an existence from which everything Indian, except in a purely menial capacity, was

as jealously excluded as the Indian mosquito was from their slumbers. The focal point of this life was the principal club in each station, to which everybody belonged who was admitted to the superior caste of sahibs—roughly the equivalent of the English “county”—and which was the centre of a perpetual round of sports and amusements adapted in every possible respect to the English model.

It was an existence even more sedulously purged from anything that could now be called highbrow than that of the most bucolic country house or Philistine villa at home. It was almost impossible if anyone had wanted to—which hardly anybody did—to have listened to classical music, or to have found a presentable bookshop within a thousand miles radius (the club libraries were generally beneath contempt) or to have polished up one’s mind with conversation on any but the hackneyed lines of sport and personal gossip, though by Mr. Churchill’s account there would appear to have been a certain amount of not very illuminating argument on the subject of religion. That any subaltern should find it possible, under such circumstances, to plunge into a course of intensive self-culture in philosophy, science, ethics, and literature, would seem an idea too fantastic for fiction. And yet this is just how we find the young Churchill employing his leisure.

He had certainly enough of that. In the cavalry, parade was generally got through in the cool of the early morning, after which officers retired to the seclusion of their bungalows until the cool of the evening called them forth to the polo ground, or whatever form of strenuous recreation they might happen to fancy. It was these half-dozen hours or so between work and play that he employed in a course of reading truly heroic in its scope, in which he strove to make up for all he had missed in his lack of a university education. That highly cultured woman, his mother, was able thoroughly to enter into the spirit of his endeavour, and to keep him continually supplied with parcels of books from home, of her own sympathetic choice as much as his.

We may surmise that part at least of this hunger and thirst for knowledge had come from his Cuban experiences. The fact of his having committed himself to the job of getting off his letter to *The Daily Graphic* wherever there was access to the front, must have brought him face to face, in the most urgent way, with the problems of literary craftsmanship. And it was one of Churchill’s instincts to do with his might whatever his hand found to do, even when that hand plied a pencil by the light of a guttering candle. To unlock his word-hoard—that was how the father of English craftsmanship in this kind would have put it. But that, if you come to think of it, is the same thing as unlocking one’s mind, and without a mind richly stocked there will be no hoard worth unlocking. Whether or not this was actually the course that Mr. Churchill’s thoughts pursued, it would fully account for his action.

He set himself to conquer knowledge not in the detached spirit of a scholar, but as a practical man who wants all of it he can get for the practical uses of his career. It was thus that Marlborough had acquired a working knowledge of English history by steeping himself in the plays of Shakespeare. His descendant applied a similar rough-and-ready method to the classics. All the threats and persuasions of the Harrow staff had failed to excite anything but aversion from these in the learned original. Now however—and it is the voice of the true journalist—he “wanted the Socrates story”. And a lot of other stories too, notably those that Macaulay and Gibbon had to tell. Under the punkah at Bangalore he read, or rather devoured, the whole eight bulky tomes of the *Decline and Fall* from the first chapter to the last, with the *Autobiography* thrown in as a sort of savoury to that heroic feast. He scored the margin with notes which one may devoutly hope are still in existence. The loss to the world of Churchill’s Gibbon would be a literary tragedy.

A man’s mind may be known not only by the company it keeps, but by the company it bars. The record Mr. Churchill has vouchsafed us of these joyous adventures, affords us a reasonably clear insight both into the strength and limitations of his mind. Plato’s *Republic*, Aristotle’s *Politics*, Schopenhauer, Malthus, Darwin, and, above all, Macaulay and Gibbon, as representative samples, all tell the same story of an appetite voracious for the red meat of a fare robustly virile. The two last might be described as the great twin bachelors of the historic art. The world that they create is one from which the tender notes and delicate shades are so rigidly excluded, that one forgets under their spell that they have ever existed. Can one imagine that among “the other books of lesser standing” that Mr. Churchill forbears to specify are included, let us say, anything of Shelley, or Newman; of Walter Pater, or Euripides? Even at the risk of being confounded with the assurance that one or all of these figured on the list, one may venture on a fairly confident negative.

But genius has the choice of many mansions, and even bachelor flats are not excluded.

#### 4.

But literature, to all such sanguine temperaments, is never any more than a means to an end, the great end of getting on at all costs, and in spite of all obstacles. Examine the lives of the great men of action, the master builders of history, and you cannot fail to be struck by the large proportion of them that have belonged to this great, and greatly unpopular, class of uncompromising pushers and thrusters; men who feel themselves possessed of superhuman driving power, that will run to waste unless they get it harnessed to correspondingly powerful machinery—that, for instance, of which sovereigns or statesmen or great captains grasp the controls.

Admittedly there is danger, to the world and to the individual

soul, in such a disposition of mind. The line between the heroic and Satanic may be so fine as hardly to be distinguishable. The vital distinction is one of aim. Suppose the power to be harnessed to the machinery, for what end will it be employed? Will it be a great end at all, or if great, will it be that of the helper of men, or the scourge of God? The philosophy of the will to power is shared equally by crusader and infidel, by tyrant and liberator. And when Winston Churchill confronts the only other careerist as successful as himself, and hurls at him across the ether the indictment of "that wicked man", the words have a terrible and pointed significance. It is as if two travellers had met on the loneliness of a hitherto unscaled peak, and one had turned to the other with the taunt of "Judas!"

Interpret it as we will, no honest biographer can refuse to acknowledge what stares him in the face about Winston Churchill, namely that from his earliest adolescence he has concentrated all his immense energies on making the career that shall afford him the utmost possible scope, and that he has planned every step in this career with the deliberation and foresight of the Churchill, and the ruthlessness of the Jerome tradition. It is evident that from the first, the regimental life that was all in all to other young men in his tradition, was regarded by him merely in the light of a bridge, of which it has been said, "Pass over it, but do not build on it." True, he meant to exploit its full capacity for enjoyment while it lasted; his literary pursuits had not prevented him from blossoming into the Number 1 of his regimental polo team, and within six weeks of the regiment's landing in India, he had borne his part in achieving the resounding triumph of carrying off the famous Golconda Cup at Hyderabad. If he had had the sort of swollen head with which his baser critics have credited him, it would pretty certainly have been turned by the kudos accruing from such prowess, and which counted for more in that little world than any laurels he could hope to gain in the field. But it is evident that a game, however enjoyable, signified for him what it did for hardly any other Englishman of his class—a game. There was no question of turning aside a hair's breadth from the pursuit of the real thing.

The blood that he had tasted in Cuba, and one might add, the ink he had spilt, had only whetted his appetite. Already, while he was still in England, and availing himself to the full of the social opportunities that presented themselves in unlimited abundance, he had been thinking how, when, and where, to get another and a better show, and his keen eye, directed on India, naturally fixed on the Frontier, where there had been bloody war going forward, and please God might be again. What could have been more opportune than to meet, at Lord William Beresford's country house, that fine soldier, Sir Bindon Blood, who had already achieved fame in such fighting, and who would pretty certainly have charge of the next show? And what could have been more called for—or apparently easier to one of Winston's persuasive genius—than to nobble the

great man while opportunity served, and to get the promise of his good offices in securing him employment if, and when, the banked fires of tribal patriotism rekindled into a blaze. Such promises are easily given by good-natured veterans over the port, and as easily forgotten. But they can always be reminded—and a soldier's word is his bond.

The next show did, in fact, materialize in the late summer of '97, and found Churchill in what might have been an unfortunate strategical position, for he was just beginning to enjoy his first leave in England. On the voyage home he had laid another of his many stepping-stones in the friendship he had struck with an extraordinarily handsome officer, more like a Highland chieftain out of Sir Walter Scott—his name, Ian Hamilton. They were kindred spirits even in their flair for letters, and had much to talk of in the Turco-Greek war that was visibly impending, in which the romantic Hamilton was as much on the Greek side as Byron, but the practical Churchill all for the Turks and the big battalions. He had even some thoughts of getting a watching brief on their side, but this was for once a door to which all his labour and pains could find no key. Instantly, however, the news from the Frontier reached him, he did not hesitate for a second. Glorious Goodwood and the delights of leave were forgotten. In frantic haste he wired off to Sir Bindon, and rushed back to India. A belated and not too encouraging telegram was all he got by way of an answer, but it proved good enough to bluff a sympathetic C.O. into granting the necessary leave. After that it was child's play to get a correspondent's job for the Allahabad *Pioneer*, and his mother, that brilliant and reliable second, had been at work her end getting it doubled by one for *The Telegraph*. And so behold him, duly armed with a temporary commission in a Sikh regiment, detraining at the railhead, Nowshera, still not too late to be in for the most exciting part of the proceedings.

Too exciting it might have proved for anyone with less gluttonous tastes for such nourishment. For he had succeeded in coming in for the sort of show of which little knowledge was apt to filter through to a public at home, patriotically obsessed with the might and efficiency of imperial expansion—in fact a first-class military muddle that modern weapons and ancient courage only just prevented from ending in tragedy.

This was when the brigade, to which Mr. Churchill was attached, was entrusted with the task of punishing, for what most people would judge sufficient cause, a small but extremely ferocious tribe called the Mamunds, the Moslem equivalent of a highland clan, whose glen was one of the innumerable valleys of the Himalaya—a funnel-shaped cul-de-sac. Nothing could be simpler than for the soldiers and sepoy to advance up this valley, as far as they could go, burning or demolishing everything in their path—an easy task, as they found the whole place completely deserted. Unfortunately, as so often happens on such occasions, they appear to have acted on

the assumption that an enemy who remained out of sight might also be left out of account, so that by the time that the most advanced units had spread themselves fanwise along the heights at the end of the valley, the whole force was split up and dispersed into small and isolated groups each of which presented any competent enemy with the opportunity to catch it with a sudden concentration of overwhelmingly superior numbers. And the Mamunds were a highly competent enemy who had been lying doggo and biding their time for this very opportunity. Churchill, who, it is hardly necessary to say, had managed with a handful of Sikhs to get into the post of extremest peril, suddenly found himself in a situation in which it must have seemed that only a miracle could enable the survivors of his party to escape annihilation in its most hideous form. By hand-to-hand fighting, in which "the courage and resolution", as recorded in dispatches, "of Lieutenant W. L. S. Churchill", and perhaps the charmed life that he bore, played a leading part, they did manage to get away, carrying their wounded, to a position of greater safety; though for the whole force it had become now merely a question whether it would be able to get out of the ghastly mess in which it had landed itself. Eventually it did, "damnably mauled", but substantially intact, and the systematic operations that were subsequently undertaken enabled the imperial Power to save face by the destruction of such tribal property as the valley contained. But it was an episode not exactly calculated to impress an extremely critical observer with a proper reverence for constituted authority.

But after all, the thrills of mountain warfare were no more an end in themselves than those of the polo ground. All was part of the great evolving scheme of an aspiring young man's career, and the really important thing was the way it was followed up. For the opportunity had come to him of lifting himself out of the undistinguished crowd of those whom Kipling has eulogized as

Little men, men of little showing,

and putting himself once and for all before the public as one of the people with whom it had to reckon. He had gone some way towards this with his articles in *The Telegraph*, but his strategic eye had perceived the opening for a stroke of real decisiveness. He would embody his experiences in book form.

This, in itself, would have been no more than the normal procedure of every correspondent who can induce a publisher to put his collected articles between covers. But Churchill had something in view far more ambitious. No work of mere journalism would suffice him. He would cut in as the recognized authority on a subject that was exactly calculated to appeal to an Empire-intoxicated public. The man in the street had a vague notion of stirring events somewhere on the frontiers of India, but his knowledge of them was comprised in one or two vaguely stirring names like Chitral and Dargai, and the incident of the heroic piper who continued to skirl un-



daunted when he had fallen shot through both legs. Now it would be an open book to them—with his name on the title page. A book that everyone would recognize as a little classic of its kind, unless all those hours of intensive study, under the punkah, of Gibbon and Macaulay, were to go for nothing.

We have no record of his intentions, but when all the threads are thus woven together into one cord of a most successful strategy, we may infer them with some confidence. The book, *The Makaland Field Force*, was an immediate best seller; the reviewers lauded it to the skies, and everybody was reading it, up to the Prince of Wales himself, who, though he seldom opened a book, and was none too free with his correspondence, found time to honour the author with an enthusiastic letter of congratulation. Nor was this success undeserved. If the book is unread today, it is because the little wars that seemed so important in the 'nineties have been dwarfed out of all significance by the scale of later events. But those who care to peruse it, even today, for the interest that attaches to anything bearing its author's name, may still recognize it for a little masterpiece of its kind, by far the best book that has ever been produced on the subject of which it treats, which, in spite of the disclaimer of the preface, is not only that of a particular campaign, but of its whole geographical, political, historical, and psychological background. Even now, it is probably the best popular introduction to an understanding of the Frontier question, the essential factors of which have not changed so greatly in the course of time. And when one considers that it is avowedly the work of a subaltern in barracks at Bangalore, one can only stand amazed at the easy assurance with which he weighs, balances and pronounces judgment, not only on high matters of statesmanship, but even of military policy. Impudence perhaps—but what sublime impudence!

Or at least—what really mattered—entirely successful. For now everybody was talking of Randolph's son, Winston. He would see to it that they were kept talking, until the day that Randolph himself was only remembered as the father of Winston Churchill.

## 5.

Churchill was still a subaltern of only three years' standing, but it was already glaringly apparent—in whatever sense you like to take it—that he had become many sizes too big for his regimental boots. He was now committed, with furious and concentrated energy, to the pursuit of a career in which he had already achieved such success as to make himself a personage of greater public importance than any of his brother officers, or all of them put together; and the barracks at Bangalore had become little more than a base to which he could retire to gather force for the next offensive in his campaign. The whole situation was becoming rapidly impossible for everybody concerned. However proud the mess might be of this brilliantly in-

congruous member, and however much in demand might be his support at polo, it would be too much to expect it to submit with gladness to his use of it in the light of a convenience. And in fact, nobody but Winston Churchill could have succeeded in prolonging his military existence for a week on these terms.

And outside, jarring with the chorus of adulation, there was beginning to be heard a note of less complimentary import. This bumptious young upstart, this subaltern who gave lectures to generals, this scandalously overprivileged cadet of a ducal House—was it not high time for him to be taught his place by a course of healthy discipline; instead of allowing him to run wild in the quest of medals and journalese self-advertisement? The quickest way to get out of a crowd may be by shoving through bull-headed; but it is not the way to universal popularity.

There would, after his return from the Frontier, appear to have been some sort of a concerted endeavour to cramp his style within the limits of regimental normalcy. But it was doomed to failure from the start, and the next year saw him harder at work than ever employing all his resources of push and pull to exploit the advantage he had already achieved, and get a front place in every good show there was going. The Frontier seemed again the location indicated, and there is no need to recount the heroic feats of nobbling and wire-pulling by which—at the imminent risk of overstepping leave—he managed to get himself booked for the next great expedition against the tribesmen, only to find his endeavour frustrated by the success of the political department in negotiating a settlement at the last moment.

He was not the sort to be put out of his stride by one piece of hard luck, and as so often happens, it was really a blessing in disguise. For now the Frontier, like the regiment, had become too restricted a field for his expansion. Another scramble among the hills would be more or less of an anti-climax, and the subject of the Frontier was one whose literary possibilities he had fairly exhausted. The centre of dramatic interest had shifted to Egypt, where at last, after more than two years of patient, deliberate advance, the army of Sir Herbert Kitchener, heavily reinforced from England, was approaching the centre of the Dervish power at Omdurman, and preparing to avenge the national shame of Gordon's death. That was plainly the place at which fresh fame and laurels were to be won; the problem was how to get there—a far tougher one than any which had hitherto confronted him. For not only was his duty with his regiment in India, but those powers of influence and wire-pulling that had hitherto served him so well seemed brought up against an impenetrable wall of resistance. For the army of the Nile was under the control of the all-powerful Sirdar, and he, Kitchener, was a mere sapper, quite outside the freemasonry of the really best society, and determined to run his own show on a basis of scientific efficiency. The last thing that he was going to do was to provide places on his staff,

or anywhere else, for privileged young men out for quick advancement.

The irresistible force had come up against the immovable obstacle. For without riding roughshod over the authority of the strongest living Englishman in his own unquestioned domain, there could be no hope of the Egyptian project succeeding. Anyone but Churchill would have given it up. But his measureless self-confidence was not in the least daunted. If it was to be his will against Kitchener's—so be it.

The first step of the campaign of course had been to get leave and join forces with his mother. She herself wrote to Kitchener on her son's behalf with all the persuasiveness at her command—she might as well have tried her arts on the Great Pyramid. An even more powerful ally was next enlisted in the person of Lord Salisbury, the Premier, who had been so carried off his feet by the perusal of Winston's book, as to invite the author to a personal interview. Here was luck indeed, and perhaps the kindly old statesman was not sorry at the opportunity of doing a good turn to the son of the man whose career he had so tragically cut short. He would try what he could do with Kitchener. But Kitchener was not going to have his appointments interfered with by Lord Salisbury or anyone else, and he was quite clearly resolved not to have Winston under his command for any consideration, or in any capacity, whatever. Nor was Salisbury prepared to go beyond persuasion.

This was surely checkmate. But not to the like of Leonard Jerome's daughter and Randolph Churchill's son; and in the British army there were no limits set to the power of influence, judiciously applied. But how? Sedulous enquiry among Lady Randolph's set revealed that the redoubtable Sir Evelyn Wood, now Adjutant General at the War Office, had been heard fulminating at the dinner table against this intractability of Kitchener's in the matter of appointments. Here was an opportunity for working on that same power complex that had caused the sacrifice of poor "Bwab's" goatee. For the British contingent that had been sent out to reinforce Kitchener was, as one would have put it in India, a War Office banderbast. And one had only to suggest that this sapper fellow was trenching on Sir Evelyn's inviolate right to job any little job that he wanted, to make it a question of honour with him to put through this one. Nothing simpler! A peremptory order came through from the War Office attaching Lieutenant Churchill to the 21st Lancers, and ordering him to join it forthwith, though at his own expense, in Egypt. Sir Evelyn must have felt that he had done the nearest thing to shaving Kitchener's moustache for him.

If Kitchener had liked to retort in kind, his next move would have been equally simple. For though he could not prevent Sir Evelyn from dumping his protégé down in Egypt, he had an undoubted right to dispose of him on arrival, and he could have done it in such a way as to make him very sorry he had ever come, or *The Morning*

*Post* that it had been persuaded to give him a handsome commission as correspondent in a war to which he might never get nearer than a thousand odd miles. But Kitchener had other things to think about than having his tit for tat with Sir Evelyn, or his revenge on a subaltern. If he even condescended to give a second thought to the matter, it would have been quite in character for him to have accompanied it with a grim chuckle at so successful a piece of impudence. Much more probably he ignored it altogether.

## 6.

Even by Kitchener's forbearance, Churchill had only just done it, for by the time he had made his way up that long, narrow waterway through the desert to join his regiment, the final advance was just beginning that was to culminate in the sensational set piece of the whole drama, the great battle that everybody was looking forward to at the gates of the Khalifa's capital, and the prospect of which had keyed up the army to the highest pitch of excitement and expectation.

Everyone, that is to say, with one exception—that of Kitchener himself. To him the prospect was no more exciting than that of shovelling out of his way an unusually large accumulation of rubbish that blocked the end of a path that he had patiently cleared. For war was not to him what it was to the dashing young cavalryman—a glorious and a gentlemanly game. There was nothing glorious or gentlemanly about it to his way of thinking, nor did he approach it, now or hereafter, from the angle of a soldier, in the traditional sense—in all his career he never attempted anything like a brilliant coup of tactics or strategy. He was a sapper, and he planned his campaigns as he would any other problem of engineering, by calculating the strains and stresses he had to encounter, and the strength of material he would need to overcome them.

In this particular campaign the main problem was not one of fighting at all, but simply of railway building. Once take the railway up the Nile to a head sufficiently close to Khartoum, and the military problem would solve itself. Wiseacres in high places had shaken their heads with one accord, and pronounced the whole thing impossible. Kitchener, who had made exact calculations, proceeded without hurry or delay to get on with the job. Naturally Dervish interference had to be reckoned with like any other obstacle, and a military machine forged of sufficient strength to shoot it out of the way. But Kitchener had provided for this in his calculations as he had for everything else, and had let Lord Salisbury's Government know well in advance the exact amount of extra man-power he would require for the concluding stage of the job. That he had got; and the railhead was now advanced to the point from which it would be safe to march into Omdurman. If the Dervishes were ill-advised enough to interfere, they might have to be shot down in

quite unprecedented numbers. But Kitchener had provided the men, the leaders, and the material, sufficient for this purpose, with a reasonable margin of safety against accidents. And when it became apparent that the Khalifa was coming out with his whole army to put these calculations to the test, it is probable that he was considerably less exercised about it, than he had been about many of the intricate problems of railway construction that he had had to work out with his fellow sapper, Percy Girouard, during the past two years.

But to young Churchill, now safely embodied in the 21st, it was as it had been with those Puritan buff coats, who had rejoiced greatly at the sight of the enemy. Here was no frontier scrap, but a historic pitched battle impending, with all appertaining pride, pomp and circumstance. His status was an extraordinary one, for he was riding to battle, so to speak, with a sword in one hand and a pen in the other. He had equally to think of his duty to the men in his troop, and to his paper. The cavalry was naturally, on this 1st of September, thrown out on the desert in front of the army, and as they topped a small rise, telltale patches and smears on the sand revealed unmistakably that the best had happened, or was about to happen. Before long Lieutenant Churchill was summoned to the presence of his Colonel, who directed him to take good stock of the situation and then ride back with all-speed to the Sirdar, and report. Even he confesses to a certain searching of heart about his probable reception.

The army of the Nile, horse, foot, and artillery, coming on in close order of battle formation, must have presented a majestic spectacle of a kind that will never be seen in war again; and there, riding ahead and alone in front of the centre, was a figure that would have been unmistakable, even without the two fluttering standards, British and Egyptian, that were borne behind him. It is characteristic of Churchill that he should have planned to carry off this interview so as to make the best possible impression—even to the extent of giving his horse a breather before cantering up to the Sirdar's side. As he announced his presence, the blue eyes met his own—he noticed their “queer rolling look”—with a regard of intent, but quite impersonal scrutiny. A slight nod bade him proceed with his carefully prepared and compressed statement. Kitchener rode on in silence, slowly digesting it, and then. . . . “How long do you think I have got?” This had not figured among the reactions his informant had anticipated, but to display the least hesitation would have been fatal. So he loosed off an ostensibly preconsidered estimate of at least one hour, and probably an hour and a half, at the present rate of enemy progression. The Sirdar registered this with an unindicative toss of the head, and then, with a slight dismissive inclination, closed the interview. What impression he had received, or whether he had even realized that this was Winston Churchill, had somehow ceased to be a matter of much significance.

The accuracy of Churchill's estimate, though on checking it up at leisure he judged it to have been as good a shot as he could have made, was never put to the test. The Khalifa did not intend to come on that day, and so the army camped under the stars in pleased anticipation of what it knew was impending on the morrow. Churchill was now certain of his great combined show and scoop, but how exciting a show, even he could not have anticipated. The first phase of it was merely spectacular for him—but what a spectacle! It is the duty, as well as the privilege of the cavalry, to be the eyes of the army, and it was from a commanding ridge that he beheld the hordes of Moslems deploy beneath their banners, some of them in chain mail that may have been worn against the crusaders, most in their gaily fluttering tunics or jibbehs, and come surging in one wild, yelling onrush to sweep the infidel invaders into the Nile. And then, while they were still half a mile distant, the process of extermination, pitiless, scientific, impersonal, began. It was not a battle, in the old sense, so much as the triumph of mechanism over man, of steel and lead over fanatical devotion and courage. It was not long before thousands of jibbehs were dotting the desert—motionless, few of them less than 800 yards from the Anglo-Egyptian lines. The rest had vanished. And having thus effectively removed the obstruction from his path, Kitchener promptly set his machine in motion on the few remaining miles to the Dervish capital. The young idealist of war had seen it unmasked in its crudest modern form, but any disgust with which the spectacle may have inspired him tended not so much to disillusion him with war, as to confirm the instinctive aversion he had derived from his encounter with that man of ice and iron, the engineer realist, who could thus reduce the noblest art on earth to its lowest inhuman denominator.

But the morning was not to pass before he was to have the opportunity of sampling war in its most approved, traditional form. For it was the Sirdar's intention to get into Omdurman ahead of whatever survived of the Khalifa's host, and thus cut out the untidy business of street fighting. And the 21st were directed to ride out in advance, heading off the enemy as occasion served. For a force equipped with magazine carbines, this, like the rest of the day's operations, ought to have been a plain-sailing job of human demolition. But this unit was not one of those that had been prepared by Kitchener for the part it was expected to play in the working of his military machine, but it had been lent him by the War Office fully primed with all the notions of the cavalry arm and its function inculcated by such authorities as Sir Evelyn Wood, Colonel Brabazon or, for that matter, Prince Rupert.

Accordingly, no sooner did a number of Dervishes pop up out of a dry water-course on their flank, and start taking pot shots, than it instantly struck the Colonel that here was a grand opportunity

of doing the sort of thing one had been taught at Aldershot to regard as the supreme function of cavalry. He accordingly wheeled them into line, and led them, hell for leather, at the enemy. Unfortunately it never appears to have struck him as necessary to find out, in advance, what the water-course might contain, which proved to be a horde of lusty warriors, some thousands strong, and lined up twelve deep to receive his 300 with weapons no more primitive than their own *arme blanche*. In fact it was the one and only time that day, that any part of Kitchener's command was sporting enough to throw away all the advantages of civilized armament, while conceding the enemy his of superior numbers in a good man-to-man tussle.

It was a confused, scrambling business, quite different from the Aldershot model, and consisted in the horsemen getting down the steep bank, trusting to weight and momentum to enable them to shove somehow through the crowd and out on the other side, while the Dervishes slashed, and shot, and hamstrung, and hacked the life out of any unfortunate Christian who fell among them. The whole affair did not last more than a couple of minutes, and by that time the Lancers were forming up on the desert on the other side of the water-course, with nearly a quarter of their personnel and more than a third of their horses out of action. Churchill's troop had been the last but one on the extreme right, where, since the Lancers' line rather overlapped the enemy's, the crowd was less thick and it was comparatively easy for a polo champion, mounted on a clever pony, to make his way through; though there was some tricky work, with bridle and revolver, to be done, before getting clear of this stirred-up, human hornets' nest.

The Dervishes were still there, substantially intact, and the troopers were only too eager to have another go at them, but by this time it seems to have occurred to the Colonel that having got his regiment badly enough mauled to satisfy honour, he might now bethink him of the carbine, which is after all as good as a lance a thousand yards in length, and of far greater penetrative power. Accordingly he dismounted a couple of squadrons for the prosaic business, which might just as well have been done first as last, of enfilading the water-course with rapid fire. The disgusted occupants, perceiving that the enemy no longer intended to fight fair, lost very few minutes in making good their escape.

Such was the famous charge of the 21st Lancers, the incident of the Battle of Omdurman that attracted nine-tenths of the limelight, and was trumpeted in the press as comparable with the charge of the Light Brigade—which in point of intelligence it certainly was. For Kitchener, it must have constituted the one untidy smudge on what would otherwise have been a satisfactory day's work. But since the results had been obtained according to plan, he probably did not bother much about it, while as for the partial crippling of his light cavalry, that was a matter for the War Office, since he had no further use for its services.

As for Churchill, his first impressions of the proceedings are indicated by the question he had fired off at his second sergeant—whether he had enjoyed himself. But there was food for thought as well as enjoyment, and it is perhaps not too bold a surmise that the experience had its part in finally convincing him that life in a crack cavalry regiment was not good enough for an up-to-date young man with a career to make.

8.

There was no doubt about it now, that his commission in the Hussars had become a weight round his leg of which he could not disembarass himself too soon. Even financially, he was running the business at a loss, which, if it were allowed to run on from year to year, would mean resort to the banias, or native money-lenders, and a steadily accumulating burden of debt. He had found, moreover, that he was able to make more money by a single book than would have been covered by a couple of years' pay; and this was only a beginning, for the name that he had made in journalism would enable him to coin money, hand over fist, if he chose to specialize in this career. But to these highly practical considerations may be added another which, though it may not have risen into the full light of consciousness, may well have been the one that finally tilted the scale. For it is fairly evident that his experience had by this time rubbed off the last gilt of the cavalry gingerbread. To go on playing at the soldiers of a hundred years ago, and rehearsing year in and year out for such futilities as the one in which he had just taken part, might be all very well as a game; but an ambitious young man, with boundless possibilities opening before him, has something better to do with his time than to fritter it away in the delights of a grown-up nursery.

But thus to walk out on the proudly exclusive family that had received him into its bosom, and to put off the uniform of a hussar for the mufti of a journalist politician, demanded a rare capacity of self-determination. Even the Prince of Wales had conjured him in the most explicit terms not to go the way of other military quitters, and—what may have weighed with him even more—gallant old "Bwab", for whom he had real gratitude and admiration, though no longer in command had extracted from him some sort of an undertaking not to desert the "wegiment", till he had at least helped carry it to victory in the Inter-regimental Polo Tournament for all India—an unprecedented and highly improbable feat.

If that was all, Winston Churchill had no objection. The thing would have to be done; nor does he appear to have had any serious doubt that if he really put himself to it, he could get it done. But a terrible stroke of luck seemed likely to wreck this comparatively modest programme. He had put out his right shoulder on his first coming to India, and having once happened this was always liable



to happen again. Happen it did, on the very eve of the tournament, so that it was acute pain to move his right arm, and it needed at least three weeks' complete rest for the torn muscles, before it would be fit for use. It speaks volumes for the opinion that his brother officers had of him, that they should not have heard of his resigning his key position in the team, and still more for his own spirit that he should have taken the field with his arm strapped to his side, and incapable of administering more than a feeble tap to the ball. Even so, in the final, it was one of these taps that scored the winning goal of a desperately fought game, as well as two of his side's remaining three. If it was time to quit the regimental stage, seldom has exit been so dramatic, or so glorious. No wonder they paid him the rare honour of toasting him in his last mess with them!

It was not a moment too soon, for in the even sterner contest to which he was now committed, the time factor was of decisive importance. Lieutenant Churchill had already blossomed into publicity as Winston Churchill; and it was now to be seen whether he would ripen into fame as Winston, or wilt into obscurity as plain Mr. Churchill. In life as in war success depends less on the ability to make, than to exploit, a penetration. By sacrificing his military career he had freed his hands—for what?

For a son of Randolph Churchill a political goal was the one most clearly indicated, and he was coming home with a view to getting a seat and a start in the Commons at the earliest possible moment. But he was already launched on the full tide of successful authorship, and his first call was to take it at the flood by following up his previous best seller with something even better. The kudos of it would be half the battle to the budding statesman. And there would be profit of a more tangible kind.

So that we find him strenuously engaged in raising the harvest of his Egyptian experiences. But not by writing them up, after the fashion of his fellow journalists. That was good enough for the journal that had commissioned him; but as an author, his place was with the immortals, or nowhere. This book of his was designed to stand for all time as the authoritative record of the three years' war of whose finale alone he had been witness. And this he would put in its proper setting, by telling the whole story of the rise and fall of Mahdist domination in the Sudan. The opening sentence, which might have been penned by Cæsar himself, sets the level of the whole book:

"The north-eastern quarter of the continent of Africa is drained and watered by the Nile."

What is most remarkable of all, in an author of 24, is the air of majestic assurance with which he handles the weightiest matters of statesmanship and strategy, and passes judgment on those responsible. No doubt this is partly to be accounted for by the influence of his stylistic models, Gibbon and Macaulay; but it is also the authentic expression of his own individuality. From his Harrow

days, the grand manner had been natural to him: "My father, who is a very great man . . ." and his father's son spoke not as the scribes of journalism. How much of this was greatness, and how much megalomania, time might reveal. But nobody, reading the book without knowledge of the author, would detect any trace of youthful stridency or conceit. No elder statesman ever maintained a greater appearance of dispassionate calm in pronouncing judgment on men and events.

We have the test case of Gordon, in which we now have the opportunity of comparing Mr. Churchill's work with what will always rank as one of the supreme masterpieces of English prose composition by Lytton Strachey. Mr. Churchill palpably lacks those resources of feline subtlety, that power of insinuation and suggestion, that are Strachey's unique secret, but he leaves us feeling we know more about the strength and weakness of the real Gordon, and have gleaned a more authentic notion of the Gordon story, from his briefer exposition, than we can ever hope to derive from the other's brilliant caricature. No one, certainly, could ever imagine him condescending to obtain piquancy by propagating the libel of Gordon's drunkenness, any more than we can imagine Strachey capable of such a sentence as that with which Churchill concludes about Gordon's statue; how he "seems still, with bowed head and thoughtful countenance, to revolve the problems of the dark Sudan and, inattentive to the clamour of men, inquires what is acceptable to God". But then Churchill was by nature a worshipper, and Strachey by choice a debunker, of heroes.

But Churchill's attitude is unmistakably protestant towards what was, at the time of writing, a national hero cult. His criticism of the Sirdar, to whose powers of organizing victory he accords full, though perhaps slightly reluctant, recognition, is not of the soldier, so much as of the man. It was Kitchener's apparent lack of human feeling that repelled him, his utter failure to think of human problems in any but mechanical terms. He had been shocked and scandalized when the same treatment had been applied to the shrine and body of the dead Mahdi, as Henry VIII had meted out to those of the English saints. To him it seemed "a wicked act", and though the epithet "wicked man" was reserved for another than Kitchener, it came uncommonly close to being implied of him.

It is equally characteristic of Churchill that his innate chivalry should have gone out towards a gallant enemy, even of so unprepossessing a character as the Dervishes. Kitchener's ill-concealed willingness to let his troops kill them off like so much noxious vermin, was by no means excused in his eyes by their own even greater ruthlessness.

*The River War*, which involved a vast amount of reading and personal enquiry, was an achievement of more ambitious scope than *The Malakand Field Force*, comprising as it did two solid volumes; and it was not till more than a year after his return from the Sudan,

when the South African War had already started and the author had set forth on this greater adventure, that it saw the light of publication. This was unfortunate, since the Egyptian War had already taken a back place in the public attention. But the name of Winston Churchill on the title page was sufficient advertisement in itself, and the book was a monumental enough achievement to establish its author in the front rank as a man of letters, and in a class altogether apart from the most brilliant of journalists.

It was on his voyage home from India, while the book was still in process of incubation, that Churchill was lucky enough to coincide with another young man who, though a fellow of an Oxford college, had, unlike him, chosen the way of pure journalism, had already made a name for himself as the most brilliant newspaper correspondent of his time, and was on the high road to fame and fortune as the picked man of Alfred Harmsworth's new *Daily Mail*. This was G. S. Steevens, whose meteoric career was to be so tragically cut short by the enteric germ, at the siege of Ladysmith. Not the least of Churchill's assets was his power of striking up a friendship, at a moment's notice, with any leading man with whom he came in contact.

This meeting had an important sequel, for Harmsworth's restless eye, always keen to spot a winner among the youthful entries, had fastened upon Churchill, and he employed Steevens, who was nothing loath, to tell the world, through the world's most powerful megaphone, of this man of twenty-four, that there would hardly be room for him in Parliament at thirty, or in England at forty.

This was putting it a trifle too hopefully. Parliament perhaps! But even for Winston Churchill, more than another sixteen years, besides much bitter experience, would be needed before England would become too small to hold him. Add another quarter of a century, and then . . .

9.

Meanwhile, during the spring and summer of 1899, Churchill's career was in a transitional stage. It was easy enough to predict that there would hardly be room for him in Parliament six years hence; but he had to get into Parliament, and that was not so simple a matter as it might have seemed at first sight for the son of Randolph Churchill, in whom everybody was beginning to recognize one of the coming men. For seats in Parliament—though it was one of those things that were seldom mentioned in respectable print—had their price in the market, and unless one was prepared to stump up with the necessary funds, one was unlikely to be adopted as the official party candidate for a practicable constituency, in spite of any more ostensible claims that one might have upon the choice of a free electorate. And Winston Churchill was, for one of his class, decidedly impecunious at this particular juncture.

But he possessed the next best thing to money in almost unlimited influence, and intimate contacts with most of the important personages in the political world. If he could not buy that up-to-date version of the rotten borough known as a safe seat, he could at least hope to establish himself as one of the people so indispensable to his party, that sooner or later a place would have to be found for him. The party was, of course, the Tory Unionist Party, which, apart from the family tradition, was the obvious location for a young man so exclusively identified in the public eye with the military aspect of imperial expansion. And the Tory Party was still not only in power with an overwhelming majority, but had to all appearance a dynamic superiority equally unquestionable, in its identification with the cult of Empire that, under the high priesthood of Joseph Chamberlain—incomparably the most forceful political personality since Gladstone—had intoxicated the public imagination.

Empire then, and Toryism, were the inevitable leads for an ambitious young soldier turned politician. The imperial fever was, in fact, rising to delirium during this summer. Kitchener's sensational triumph had been followed up by the public humiliation of France, whose forces had appeared on the Upper Nile above Khartoum, and who after weeks of tension, had declined the challenge of British sea power, and tamely accepted notice to quit the Sudan. Now an even more impressive demonstration was impending of imperial prowess, in South Africa, where "Joe" was in process of taking a spectacularly firm line with the Transvaal Boers, and the public was tip-toe with expectation for the hour when the invincible British army should be sent out to avenge the Liberal humiliation of Majuba, as it had that of Khartoum. A war a year promised even more glorious thrills than a jubilee every ten, and for the ordinary man in the street foreboded no greater inconveniences.

Amid this atmosphere of almost wholly pleasing tension, comparatively little public attention was attracted to a double by-election that took place at the height of the summer in almost the biggest constituency in England, that of the great cotton-spinning town of Oldham, the sort of place of whose existence few members of the English upper class are more than vaguely aware, except when their names are written up on the club boards as gains or losses—important enough then—at general elections. Oldham was practically always one or the other, since it was one of the most notoriously unstable constituencies in the country. It had gone Conservative in the electoral landslide of 1895, so that it could now fairly confidently be predicted that the time had come to give the other side a try, especially under by-election conditions. Indeed from the point of view of the Central Office, it was probably a good thing to allow Oldham to get its gesture over and done with before the general election, when it could be reckoned on with some confidence for another turn of the weathercock.

So that when that Office decided to give its coming young man his

chance as one of its two candidates for this presumably Government seat, the gift was decidedly less generous than it might have seemed. It was, in fact, giving him a good push on the declining curve of the switchback, and putting him up to fight a battle that no conceivable prowess could have won.

To the aspiring candidate it always seems as if he were the chancier whose crowing will make the sun rise. But to anyone who has studied the results of elections over a long period of time, it will be apparent what a very small part the merits of candidates have had in determining the results. Indeed, to the experienced student, it is practically always possible after the announcement of the first dozen, or even half dozen, seats of a general election, to go to bed with a sufficient working foreknowledge of the final figures. There will of course be one or two freak seats that will show unpredictable variations, and in which the personal factor may possibly have been decisive, but these may be trusted to cancel one another out on a final count, and in general it may be said that the candidates are adrift on deep currents of popular feeling that they are powerless to influence.

So that Winston Churchill must have found this first experience of an electoral battle rather like that of a cavalry charge. Both were heralded with the most imposing parade and flourish of trumpets; both turned out to be in practice untidy, scrambling affairs, in which one found oneself without any control over the situation, and dependent on the numbers and momentum of one's own crowd relatively to that of the enemy, for one's chance of shoving through with a whole skin. In his autobiography he computes ruefully how no less than fourteen months of his precious time on earth have been wasted in this "wearing clatter" of the hustings.

Still, he was finding his political feet, spouting away valiantly on all kinds of subjects about which he knew little and cared less, and doing his best to satisfy the demands of those innumerable cranks and busybodies who flourish with luxuriant rankness on the by-electoral soil. Oldham had a characteristic Lancastrian weakness for the fine or coarse shades of Protestantism, and the candidates felt that much of their success would depend on their angling for these odd pockets of votes. Churchill, who was quite at sea at this sort of verbal finesse, made the serious blunder of yielding to pressure on some Church bill or other that happened to be officially fathered by the party—which caused Arthur Balfour to characterize him in his irritation as a young man not of promise, but of promises.

But it probably made no difference to signify. The good people of Oldham enjoyed the entertainment provided for them, and followed the form of their candidates with sporting appreciation. They then proceeded to record their votes for whatever happened to be the colour they had been backing, which on this occasion, for a comfortable majority of them, was—as the Central Office had probably realized from the start—anti-government. And of course, poor

Winston discovered that there was a general tendency to blame it—as they might have blamed the weather—on him. Anyhow, there was consolation in the fact that he was now ensconced in the candidature, and might look forward to being thrown up into Parliament on the next turn of the electoral wheel.

One of the winning pair was another rising young man, the son of an immensely wealthy Newcastle shipowner, called Runciman. As they shook hands in a cordial farewell after the contest, he remarked to Churchill that more would be heard of both of them.

10.

But fighting of a sterner and more congenial sort was in store for him. For the storm-clouds that had been gathering all through the summer, over the passes of the Natal border, burst with crashing reverberation early in October, when President Kruger, seeing the British mobilizing, and anxious to get his own blow in first, launched an ultimatum that was tantamount to a declaration of war. It was a war on which the Government, the army, and the most vocal part of the British public, embarked with light hearts. The music-halls rocked with the joy of vicarious belligerency. Winston Churchill, who had come before the electors of Oldham as a pure-blooded imperialist, was naturally among the most ardent backers of the great "Joe", with whose inspiring intimacy he had recently been honoured, and whose firm policy exactly squared with his own militant instinct.

He had no need to pull wires this time in order to get a front place in the stalls for this grand imperial finale of the dying century. *The Morning Post* was only too happy to recover his services as a war correspondent, and he even managed to get a berth on board the liner that was conveying to Table Bay Sir Redvers Buller, the hero of heroes who had been appointed to the command of the Army Corps—a name that to the British public signified an overwhelming host of men—which was going out to polish off old Kruger in style.

There was only one anxiety eating at all hearts on board. Was it not quite on the cards, that by the time they had got to the end of their long voyage, everything would be over but the shouting? No one had more reason to be troubled about this than Churchill, who had inside information from the highest possible source—that of Chamberlain himself, who had confided to him just before starting that—to anticipate a phrase of his son's—Buller had very likely missed his bus, since the Division already out in Natal might settle the whole business before the army corps could arrive. These fears seemed to be amply confirmed when the news was signalled from a passing steamer of British victories. But Buller, one of those heavy, beef-witted men who so seldom fail to inspire confidence, comforted his staff with the oracular assurance that there might still be enough left to give them a fight outside Pretoria. Then, as Churchill says, every heart felt lighter of its load.

There was no need to have worried—on that score. When they arrived at Cape Town a very different prospect awaited them from the one they had anticipated. The Boers were everywhere encamped on Imperial soil and besieging the British garrisons. The British had been turned out of Northern Natal, and the Division was standing at bay at Ladysmith, in the path of the converging Boer armies. To Natal, therefore, proceeded Churchill, hoping to join this force, and renew contact with his friend, Ian Hamilton.

But by the time he had reached Natal the situation had catastrophically deteriorated. Sir George White, with the Division, had been soundly beaten and shut up in Ladysmith; and all that stood between the Boers and the sea was a mere handful of British troops at a tinpot town called Estcourt, on the railway about 40 miles to the South. Their business was to put as brave a face on the matter as possible, and trust to the sluggishness of the Boer command to refrain from crushing them, until Buller, with the major part of the army corps, had arrived to restore the situation, as no one doubted he would do.

Churchill, it need hardly be said, was determined to push himself as near as possible to the still mercifully invisible enemy. The means for this were provided by the very latest thing in scientific warfare, if the press was to be trusted, in the shape of an armoured train, packed with troops and provided with a real cannon, that made its daily and impressive progress across the rolling grasslands, in the direction of those hills whence the North wind bore the thud of distant cannon-fire. But though they felt their way forward for two hours as far as the Tugela river, behind which the hills began, the peace of the Natal countryside was unbroken. The daily trip seemed as slow and safe as if it had been through Kent.

One day, however, it turned out not so safe. The monster had lumbered its way forward as usual, and was on the return journey; when suddenly from a neighbouring rise, a storm of rifle and shrapnel fire broke upon it. And now became apparent how dangerous a thing may be a little science in war. For a train of any kind is bound by an iron law of attachment to its track. And unless you can patrol the said track all the way along, it is the simplest thing in the world to block it. The Boers must have chuckled when they saw their fire produce its expected effect on the driver, of making him put on speed, and go full tilt, round the next corner, into a stone that had been thoughtfully provided for the purpose, derailing the front trucks, and effectively blocking the line. The mighty instrument of war had all in a moment become a death-trap, and an unmissable target.

There was just one chance. By heroic efforts and great skill it might be just possible by uncoupling the engine, and working it gingerly backwards and forwards, to butt the obstruction out of the path. But this, however feasible as a peace-time job, assumed a very different complexion under a hail of fire. It was now that Lieutenant

Churchill, though he had no official military status, took charge of the situation. Scrambling out of the comparative safety of his plated truck, he proceeded to act as if any element of personal risk could, for working purposes, be ruled out. The first thing was to make sure of the one essential person, the engine-driver, who was bleeding in the face from a splinter wound, and hysterically proclaiming that as a civilian it was no part of his job to stand up and be killed, and that he was, in fact, off. Churchill did not, as almost anyone else would have done under such stress, damn and threaten the man, but ruffled up his spirits with such effect, by timely encouragement, that for the rest of the episode, he stuck to his cabin and obeyed orders like a hero. And then, while the commandant and troops in the rear trucks engaged the enemy from behind their cover, Churchill was strolling about in the open, at point-blank range of the best marksmen in the world, their bullets pinging continuously against the iron plating—intent only on getting the job done. It is no wonder that Lord Middleton, who has little reason to love Mr. Churchill, remarks in his memoirs that "he might well have received the V.C. for his conduct if any senior officer had been in a position to recommend him".

Luck, however, if it held for him personally, was against the attempt. The engine, after infinite trouble, did butt clear, but then—heart-breaking discovery! it was unable to get back and connect with the troop trucks. There was nothing for it but to crowd as many casualties as possible on the engine and tender, and get away with them. Churchill was on board among the rest, and—especially as he was still technically a civilian—no one could have blamed him for stopping there. But for him, that was unthinkable. Ordering the driver to stop, and scrambling down for the last time, he began to make his way back along the line in the direction of the now hopeless fight.

But it was not to be. The enemy was all about and, as he made one last desperate effort, with the bullets singing past him, to get to cover, there came, galloping furiously in his tracks, a solitary horseman, an imposing figure, tall and dark, who, reining up about 40 yards away, shouted to him to surrender. Civilian or no civilian, the fighting blood of the Churchills was up, and he snatched for his Mauser pistol—it was too tempting a shot at that range. And then, by that special Providence, which, if it did not watch over his career, would have to be invented to make sense of it, the pistol was not there. He remembered now having thrown it away while he was clearing the line. It was checkmate, for there was no sense in gambling for one's life against what appeared to be a certainty, or almost a certainty; for, with his usual frankness, he has admitted that there may have been just an outside chance of a get-away. But he was a realist, and not a Don Quixote. So he came quietly to the side of his captor. Had the pistol been there, one, or both, would almost certainly have ceased to exist—and these two were Winston Churchill and Louis Botha.



There are disadvantages, even in fame, and for all his being technically a civilian, the Boers were far too pleased to have got hold of Winston Churchill to be ready to part with him. And as they very naturally argued, now that the English press was ringing with the report of his heroism in this latest battle—you can't have it both ways. So here he was laid by the heels, in the officers' prison camp at Pretoria, presumably for "duration". As for escape, naturally it was a subject of talk among them, as it always is among prisoners, but in a strange country, hundreds of miles from safety, it did not appear a very practicable proposition. Nor did it prove so for any one of the score of regular officers who either then or subsequently formed part of the company.

But Churchill had not the faintest notion of staying put in even the best-guarded prison camp. He had, accordingly, been there considerably less than a month, when he got a couple of other officers to join with him in a bid for freedom. He was the first—one feels he would have been—to scale the wall, but as he waited for his companions to join him, he heard one of their voices warning him that the game was up; the sentries were on the *qui vive*. He might have had a good chance of getting back and trusting to better luck next time. But he had never turned back from an adventure yet, and so, as calmly as if he had been walking down Pall Mall, he sauntered through the crowded streets of the enemy capital, humming a tune, and so out into the suburbs till he came on a railway line that seemed to go in the right direction. Here he lay low, until a goods train, just getting up steam, presented him with a chance of swinging himself up on to one of the couplings.

The story of that famous escape is part of our national legend, and the time will surely come when the tableaux at Madame Tussaud's will include one of Winston Churchill, lurking half startled in a clump of trees somewhere—where he could only guess—in the Eastern Transvaal, with the hue and cry up after him, and not a friend, as far as he knew, anywhere on the horizon, though with too much of a companion, in the shape of a gigantic vulture who, as he testifies, "manifested an extravagant interest in my condition, and made hideous and ominous gurglings from time to time". And here, unable even to quench his thirst, he endured hour after hour of the blazing, South African midsummer, waiting until the darkness afforded him the chance to betake himself—whither?

It is at such times that men, who have the depth to be capable of it, undergo visitations of spiritual experience by which the whole subsequent course of their lives is determined. To such intensely dynamic temperaments as that of Churchill, neither physical privation nor hopelessness of prospect is a torment to be compared with that of inaction. Where there is no outlet for their energy in bodily activity, it turns inwards, and sets them thinking furiously. He was

no stranger to religious speculation and, indeed, devoutness of any sort was rather the rule than the exception, certainly among senior officers in the army; and even in the junior ranks there was a fairly general subscription to what he himself defines as the "religion of healthy mindedness". There was no element of tenderness or subtlety in all this, and hardly anything that was distinctively Christian—it was more on a par with the practical faith of the Old Testament, with the substitution for a formal Covenant of a sort of gentleman's agreement between a Good Fellow above and all good fellows below. And Churchill had reinforced this by a good deal of miscellaneous philosophic reading and speculation, which had at first gone to his head in an access of the dogmatic rationalism that was the intellectual orthodoxy of the *fin de siècle*, though his ardour for this had sensibly cooled on his discovery of the very cold comfort it provided in his frequent moments of danger.

Now, however, he had come to that pass in which reason can only inform a man, calmly and precisely, that it is checkmate for him in so many moves; and that the only sensible course is to resign the game, which, in this case, meant giving himself up to the Boers, and being dragged back ignominiously to Pretoria, or even—for this had also been mooted—shot. He tried all the philosophy he had learned, and that proved even less sustaining than the slab of chocolate that had been his day's meal. There was only one thing that could save him, and that was a miracle; but miracles—according to all the most up-to-date authorities—do not happen. But the only alternative had not got to happen. Accordingly he acted on the same instinct that had prompted him to fling himself off the bridge of Bournemouth on to the young fir—he cast himself on the only Power capable of working miracles. He prayed, as he says, long and earnestly. And this time the branch did not break. The miracle happened.

After dark he wandered forth to put God to the proof as a working proposition. He found his way to the line and waited for a train. But there was no train—they did not in fact run trains after dark on that sector. He thought of boarding a train at a station and concealing himself among the goods, but as this probably meant being ignominiously unloaded at some unknown siding, he turned it down. Stumbling miserably forward across country, he decided to throw himself on the hospitality of a Kaffir kraal, but before he had reached it, something warned him that this was not what he was meant to do. So he took the most desperate hazard of all, and tried a white man's house, one of several that clustered round a rail-side coal mine. This, when he went up boldly and knocked at the door, proved to be the only one within a twenty miles' radius belonging to an Englishman. With such aid and comfort it was comparatively plain sailing to board, in due course, the goods train, that would take him to Portuguese territory, and freedom.

Pure co-incidence is of course the rationalist solution. But the

foundations of Mr. Churchill's rationalism had already been undermined, and his was an essentially simple nature; simple enough to believe that God, having been approached in due form, had taken charge of His servant Winston; and logical enough to deduce that what God had done once, He was capable of repeating indefinitely. Such a belief may be a source of enormous strength, though perhaps also not without a certain danger.

12.

So it came about that after little more than a month's absence, Winston Churchill completed the circular tour from Natal through Pretoria and Delagoa Bay and back again to his post of war correspondent with the British force advancing to the relief of Ladysmith. But now he had attained a very different position in the public eye. This sensational exploit of his escape had lifted him from a rather tentative notoriety into world fame. Even on the other side of the Atlantic, where sentiment was aggressively pro-Boer, the publicity appeal of it was irresistible. As for his own country, his name was now as well known as ever his father's had been, and henceforth Winston Churchill was established as one of those people about whom everybody talked, joked, or disputed; and at the mention of whose name people got violently excited. He was definitely, and permanently, Winston.

Not that all this publicity was of a complimentary nature. The reaction that his name never failed to stimulate was, in many quarters, one of violent and venomous hostility. Something of the beginnings of this had already been perceptible on the appearance of his first book; now it gathered to a head. It is extraordinary that this romantically gallant exploit of his, following on his heroic conduct with the wrecked train, should apparently have raised him a host of enemies, who did everything in their power to belittle his achievement, and who did not even stop at circulating the foulest slanders concerning it round the clubs, and other places where men gossip. The Radical press waxed hysterical with abuse of him—one paper even suggested that the Boers, now they had got him, should shoot him. Partly, no doubt, this was due to the fact that political passion had been inflamed to an abnormal degree by the Boer War, and Churchill was recognized as one of the rising lights of Tory Imperialism. But it was not all that. There was something about his personality that had an abnormally irritant effect on those who did not succumb to its fascination; some heritage of the peculiarly galling aggressiveness that had distinguished his father. He was too much of what Gilbert would have called "a pushing young particle" to avoid generating friction.

He had hardly set foot again in Natal, before he had gone out of his way to arouse as much fury against himself on the ultra-patriotic Right, as on the pro-Boer Left, by wiring *The Morning Post*

to the unspeakable effect that one Boer, fighting in suitable country, was a match for five regular British soldiers, and calling for huge reinforcements of men and guns to be sent out to crush the enemy by sheer weight of numbers. It is scarcely conceivable that even from him, before his captivity, *The Morning Post* would have printed such blasphemy; but now the public was in a mood to take almost anything, so thoroughly had events sobered it out of the glad confident intoxication in which it had embraced the prospect of war. The incredible had happened. The invincible army corps, split up in defiance of all known principles of strategy into isolated detachments, had everywhere been signally defeated by numerically inferior forces of an enemy who were not even soldiers in any sense recognized at Aldershot. As for the national hero, Buller, he had been far worse than beaten; for he had exposed himself in the eyes of the world as about the most egregious muddler and mental sluggard even in the rich annals of military incompetence. And the world did not know the worst about him, namely that after getting over a thousand of his men shot down with less attempt to manoeuvre than an intelligent schoolboy would have made, and after absently abandoning about half of his artillery to be collected by the Boers after he had decided to break off what was more of a battue than a battle, he had put the crown on the whole performance by heliographing to the amazed commander at Ladysmith, to the effect that he had now better shoot away his ammunition and surrender.

The fact is that the British regular army, the stronghold of the aristocratic tradition, had shown that it had learnt nothing and forgotten nothing since the Crimea. Bulldog courage it might indeed exhibit, no less than in the days of Wellington; but in modern war this is merely suicidal, when directed by bulldog brains.

But that is the sort of thing that even now demands some temerity to say, but then constituted almost unheard-of violation of taboo. And this about one Boer being a match for five Englishmen was putting it in about the most aggressive form possible. It was, in fact, unfair, for it was not nearly as bad as all that. But a judicious restraint of language was not Churchill's strong suit at this—if it has been at any time, particularly when he was at the end of a telegraph wire; and he may have felt that the national complacency needed the most outrageous jog that could possibly be administered. But it is no wonder that military and other select clubs came near to being swept by an epidemic of apoplexy, and the wire to being fused by adjurations not to make a further ass of himself. Churchill's own comment, in his autobiography, is one of his most inimitable efforts. A certain paper, it appears, had spoken of a rumour that he was to be appointed Commander-in-Chief, pending Lord Roberts's arrival, over Buller's head. "Unhappily", he says, "this was a sarcasm."

Anyhow, here he was, with his pen, his world-wide reputation, and boundless confidence in his ability to function both as mentor

and gadfly to the general mass of his fellow countrymen. A war correspondent in those days was a very different being from the censored and regimented drudge he has since become. He could throw his weight about in his dispatches home with a lordly indifference to any other authority than that of his editor; and the stronger his self-assurance, the greater his publicity value. This state of things was exactly suited both to Churchill's temperament, and what we may call the grand strategy of his career.

The South African War has long been a drug on the literary market, and not even the name of Churchill has been able to resurrect the two books wherein he has collected the letters he sent to his paper first during the campaign for the relief of Ladysmith, and subsequently on the march to Pretoria with the Division commanded by Ian Hamilton. Which is a pity, since they make thrilling reading even to-day, which is more than can be said for any other specimen one could select from those numerous volumes of a similar tendency, with which the bookstalls were loaded at the beginning of the present century.

It is extraordinary how Churchill's reputation, his powerful connections, and above all his irrepressible pushfulness, armed him with such privileges as few correspondents can ever have enjoyed. Even the gruff Buller, wise for once in his generation, had sought to conciliate the famous young pressman by jobbing him a wholly irregular commission in the South African Light Horse, under a certain Colonel Byng, then known as "Bungo", but afterwards as Lord Byng of Vimy. It was in this capacity that he managed to climb Spion Kop, with dispatches for Colonel Thorneycroft, whom Buller had promoted over the heads of his seniors to the command of that ghastly shambles, and who notified Churchill personally of the fatal decision to abandon the hill, rather than have "a bloody mop up in the morning". When the road was at last cleared to beleaguered Ladysmith, he rode beside Dundonald with the first troops to penetrate into the British lines; he witnessed the first dramatic contact with the gaunt and starved defenders; he dined with Sir George White himself in the evening. His commission seems, in effect, to have amounted to a roving licence to go anywhere and see everything. He even managed to find time for a few luxurious days as the guest of his mother on her hospital ship *Maine*.

In Lord Roberts's advance to Pretoria he contrived to attach himself for a brief spell to his old C.O., Brabazon, and to enjoy another of his many gambles with death, when he found himself caught in the open by some Boers, at a range at which they could not possibly have missed bagging him, but for a gallant trooper who, coming in the nick of time, allowed him to jump up behind and gallop out of range on a wounded horse. At the fall of Johannesburg, he put on civilian clothes, and bicycled into the town when it was still occupied by the Boers, who would of course have had a perfect right to shoot him out of hand if any of them had spotted his identity. Having

brought off this bluff unscathed, he was received, with joy, at the dinner-table of Lord Roberts ; and a day or two later he crowned his record by riding ahead of the army, with his cousin, the Duke of Marlborough, into Pretoria itself, and—most delicious triumph of all—riding up to the State Model Schools, the place of his captivity six months before, summoning the commandant and armed guards to surrender to him—which they did, instead of taking the obvious alternative—and thus personally liberated his old comrades\* in misfortune.

While he was thus employed, he did not for a moment forget his function of keeping his paper constantly supplied with the best fruits of his now trained and assured literary craftsmanship. He had not only an instant and unlimited command of a Gibbonian Macaulayese, divested of its frills, and adapted to the capacity of the hasty reader, but he equally understood the art of focussing public attention by employing the electric cable as the vehicle of oracular pronouncements.

It is characteristic of him that he should have employed this medium to the most effect in pleading for a fair and chivalrous deal with the gallant foe, towards whom *The Morning Post*, more than any other paper, assumed an attitude of uncompromising sternness and denigration. Both in the field, and in captivity, he had come to appreciate the sterling qualities of the Boer patriots ; and the wisdom of agreeing with such an adversary, on honourable terms, while one was in the way with him, instead of driving him desperate by demanding unconditional surrender, and by treating the Cape Dutchmen who, though technically British subjects, had taken up arms with their fellow Boers, in the light of mere traitors. Had his advice been taken, the country would have been spared most of the needless and inglorious task of stamping out a resistance that attracted the sympathy of the whole world for two years after the fall of the Boer capitals.

But if the war had got to go on, it must do so without him. He had sucked the pith and marrow out of it, and had no use for dry bone. He divested himself of his commission as easily as he had assumed it, and hurried home just at the right moment to pick up the dropped thread of his political career.

### III.

## THE BUDDING POLITICIAN

### I.

WINSTON CHURCHILL had wound up his career as war correspondent only just in time. It was natural that Lord Salisbury's Government should want to exploit to the full what they genuinely believed to be their victorious conclusion of the South African War. Lord Roberts himself had assured them that the capture of the enemy capitals, and the dispersal of their field armies, were the end of the business, except for the mere police work of rounding up the few commandoes of desperate men who still rode at large on the great waterless ocean of the veldt. The country as a whole was not disposed to be too critical of the way things had been run. There had certainly been bitter disappointments and reverses, but these had only served to enhance the dramatic splendour of the recovery and final triumph. The war had not yet gone on long enough to outstay its welcome—as a sensation it had lasted just about the right time. And the Opposition was in a hopeless case, notoriously split in two between an imperialist section, and one of old-fashioned Liberals to whom the South African venture had been criminal folly, and whom it was only too easy to represent as what we should now call a party of fifth columnists. The whole political field was dominated by the vivid and dynamic personality of "Joe" Chamberlain, and it was a master-stroke of his, not easily countered, to put it about that every vote given to a Liberal was a vote given to the Boers.

Churchill would have been less than human had he failed to take full advantage of the opportunity thus presented to him of entering the best club in the world, without paying the customary entrance fee. He lost no time in repairing to his constituency of Oldham, trailing clouds of his new-won glory. Whatever sneers and slanders there might be against him in the military clubs or the pro-Boer press, to the warm-hearted Lancashire folk he was their young hero, and his return to them was a veritable, and carefully staged triumph. Still, his triumph at the polls was even now anything but a foregone conclusion. A year was a very short time to wipe out the substantial majority by which he had been defeated.

He had no reason to complain of his backing by the party leaders. The great "Joe" rendered him the priceless boon of speaking on his behalf. Perhaps he may have owed it to this intervention that he just managed to scrape through by the skin of his teeth, for when the result was declared it proved that one of the Liberal candidates had topped the poll, but that Churchill had just managed to snatch the second place from Runciman; about as convincing a tribute to his personal influence as such figures are capable of affording.

And however precarious the majority, it was enough to instal him

as M.P. for the duration of a Parliament that showed every sign of being prolonged to the limit; for it was evident from the first day of the election that the victory bluff had succeeded, and that the great Unionist majority would be returned substantially intact. And already it appeared that he had every prospect of being one of the leading lights of the political firmament, to judge from the way in which his services were in requisition as a speaker in constituencies that, according to the leisurely custom of the time, had yet to record their votes. Chamberlain paid him the high compliment of soliciting a *quid pro quo*, in his Birmingham district, for his own support; and from Birmingham he was summoned post haste by Arthur Balfour to Manchester. If these leaders had had a timely sense of their own interests, they would have bound this ambitious recruit to their allegiance by finding him some minor post in their reconstructed administration.

Mr. Churchill must have breathed a great sigh of relief at surmounting one of the most critical steps of his career. But if it was hard to get into Parliament without adequate financial support, it was, in those days when Members were expected to render their services free, no less hard to maintain oneself there. In this great work of building up his career, he never failed to appraise the situation with the eye of a realist. We may fairly assume his object to have been that of obtaining the greatest scope in action for the overwhelming energy of which he could not fail to be conscious. The building up of a Parliamentary reputation, by capturing the attention and applause of the House, was a necessary means to this end. But even of that he had got to lay the foundations, in the shape of an adequate bank balance. And therefore, during the few months that intervened between his return to Oldham and the assembly of Parliament in February, his problem was to provide himself with a modest fortune. It is one that a good many other young men have aspired to solve without getting much further than aspiration. But Winston Churchill had already shown, time and again, that when a thing had got to be done—such, for instance, as getting to Egypt in defiance of the Sirdar, or out of a Boer prison camp, or carrying off the polo cup with a crippled arm—the word impossible did not exist for him. And in this case the task was far simpler, since he had merely to cash in hard and promptly on his war-time reputation, while the bubble was still at its maximum of expansion.

He has, with an unusual and most refreshing candour, supplied us with the figures for this very necessary stage of his progress. From *The Morning Post* he had netted, during the ten months of his South African service, £2,500, and his books, especially *The River War*, had brought in rather more than £1,500—and this, be it remembered, at a time when the income-tax collector was thought to go to the limits of war-time tyranny by taking round about a modest shilling in the pound. But this £4,000 was only a beginning; for now he had discovered a veritable gold mine in the tour of lectures that he went



about from city to city delivering to packed audiences. Here again not only his reputation, but his social connections, proved of the utmost value. All the great military and political personages took their turns in the chairmanship of his meetings. In November alone he made £4,500; and when he had extracted all there was to be got out of England, he moved to a fresh field of exploitation on the other side of the Atlantic, where audiences were less free with their enthusiasm, but yielded sufficient quantities of what mattered to him a great deal more. It was an heroic feat of physical endurance—five months of it, he tells us, once or twice practically every day except Sundays; and this on the top of all his strenuous months of camping and sleeping out on the veldt. But the results were according to plan, a nice little fortune of £10,000 to carry on with in a time of cheap prices and insignificant taxation. It is characteristic of him, also, that he should have taken this to his powerful friend and ally, Sir Ernest Cassel, on whose financial genius King Edward VII himself was glad to rely in the management of his investments; and this great Jewish philanthropist and friend of England repaid his trust by disposing it so as to produce a safe and slowly increasing profit. Here was the indispensable basis for the operations on which he proposed to embark in the political field, none too solid for a man who had so keen a gust for all the good things of life—and in fact he had to eat into his capital from time to time—but such as to permit him to plan as freely and far ahead as if he had been a veritable millionaire. For though he was no more disposed than Marlborough himself to leave the money factor out of his calculations\*, no one can follow his career without realizing that money was never with him the end of life, but the means to be employed in such measure as might be judged necessary to life's fullest and freest development, and with which one might, at a pinch, take as bold a hazard as with life itself. Safety first was never even a financial motto for heroes.

But the advantages that he stood to derive from this campaign of words, at the outset of his Parliamentary career, were by no means exclusively financial. It had provided him with the most magnificent of all advertisement platforms. It is customary to speak of self-advertisement as if it were something not to be imputed without offence; and yet how many self-made political careers have been achieved without it? Where would Chatham have been, or Disraeli, or Lord Randolph himself, without a flair for successful publicity? Personages like Lord Salisbury and the Duke of Devonshire no doubt had their advertising done for them by their titles, and could afford an ostentatious contempt of public opinion, which itself is the most effective way that such portentous magnates have of attracting the limelight. But Winston Churchill had to blow his trumpet loud and bold if it was to be heard at all. And we may, perhaps, find more food for thankfulness that he did so, than for censure.

\* But—what perhaps cannot be said so emphatically of Marlborough—his methods have throughout been scrupulously honourable. Nor has he ever condescended to serve as a guinea pig on companies.

I can clearly remember his coming to Cambridge, on what must have been one of this course of lectures, and I must confess to a certain disappointment. I suppose we had been keyed up to expect something particularly striking from the hero of so many adventures. But his presence turned out to be the reverse of impressive, and his delivery strangely hesitating and—perhaps no wonder—suggested that of a tired man. There was certainly not the least hint of the empire-compelling incisiveness that, like the presence of Napoleon, constitutes today a major factor of victory. One did not realize at the time that he had suffered, like Charles I, since his infancy, from a defect of speech that, though slight, was not the least of the obstacles that he would have to surmount on the path he had chosen for himself.

2.

Lord Randolph Churchill had been 25 years old when he had started his Parliamentary career as Member for Woodstock. Just over a quarter of a century had passed since then; and now another Churchill, also at the age of 25, had been launched on the selfsame career. It might almost have seemed as if the father were having his second chance in the son. The same drama was being enacted, and most of the leading characters were still on the stage. The centre of political gravity reposed more than ever in the massive personality of Lord Salisbury, now more firmly established in power than on the day that he had disembarrassed himself of Tory Democracy and its fighting champion. And indeed, the reshuffling of offices that followed the election had given such weight to his family connections, as to lend point to Mr. Labouchere's description of Downing Street as the Hotel Cecil. But never to all appearance had there been a stronger combination, sustained as it was in the Commons by all the prestige and forcefulness of Chamberlain, and the intellectual pre-eminence of Balfour; while in the Lords the somnolent and bovine endorsement of the Duke of Devonshire constituted for most Englishmen a guarantee of its essential soundness.

For the new Member for Oldham it might thus have seemed that the path of loyalty, as reckoned by party standards, exactly coincided with that of interest. He was universally recognized as a young man of boundless promise, and his leaders had not only showered favours on his head, but—what was more important—had showed the value they placed on his support. He had only to achieve a reputation within the House commensurate with the one he had acquired outside it, to make it humanly certain that a place would be found for him in some minor office whence his promotion to Cabinet rank would only be a matter of time and vacancy.

Such was certainly the course that would have suggested itself to nine out of ten men in his position. But nobody can have followed his career thus far, without realizing how compellingly his always intractable disposition impelled him to take original, and therefore

long views. And even during those few months that had elapsed before a new Sovereign opened the 1901 Parliament, the prospect had changed in such a way as to suggest that, on a long view, the Unionist stock might be a doubtful investment. If there is one thing that the average Englishman never forgives, it is the discovery that, in his own slang, he has been sold a pup. And by the beginning of the year it had become apparent that the South African victory, on the strength of which the great majority had been sought and obtained, was a pup of the most outrageous breed. The mere occupation of cities and railway lines had done nothing whatever to bring the end of the war in sight, and merely caused it to be transformed to an interminable guerilla in which all the honours rested with the enemy, and of which the whole country, and the troops themselves, were heartily sick.

“We *can't* make a war, and we *won't* make a peace,  
And we don't know when the war is going to stop!”

were the words that a hostile lampoonist put into the mouth of the Government chiefs—and there were few circles in which the gibe did not awaken a sympathetic chuckle.

To affirm that Mr. Churchill deliberately, and in cold blood, set himself to calculate which was going to be the winning side, with a view to disposing of his allegiance, would be to credit him with a subtle simplicity more credible of the Latin than the English mind. The man who had gambled against odds with death on so many occasions, had nothing in him of the frigid stuff of which Machiavellians are made. And even if we should find him making his political book as if with an uncanny anticipation of the eventual winner, we should do him wrong in assuming this to have been the result of deliberate and cynical calculation. It would be more in keeping with our experience of human, and particularly English nature, to put it down to a sort of passionate instinct, or prudent decency of obeying one's conscience, without demanding to behold her naked.

Let us try to look at the matter as it must have presented itself to him. Grant it to have been a question of loyalty, to what cause was his loyalty most deeply engaged? To the Unionist? Yet what did that amount to in practice, but to take his principles and orders from the official leaders of the party, the same men who had cast out his father and repudiated *his* principles, the men who, by his father's reckoning, had played traitor to that true Toryism whose motto was “Trust the people”?

Now at this period of his life, more than any other, it may be said of Winston Churchill that he was possessed by one mastering desire, that of approving himself a worthy son of his father, and of taking up his father's career at the point it had been so tragically cut short. Even if we do not know how soon it was that he began to collect material for the monumental biography that was to be his next literary venture, we cannot doubt that the idea of it was simmering

in his mind during all these five years of his apprenticeship as a Parliamentary free lance. It was thus only to be expected that he should have chosen to enter Parliament on the same side of the House as that on which his father had finished. It was equally so, that once elected, he should have declined to commit his political conscience to the keeping of the party whips, and assumed an unqualified freedom to shape his own course according to the Randolphian tradition.

Let it not be forgotten that between principle and what is called political principle, there is often a profound difference. At the beginning of the present century, though there was no doubt a certain divergence of interest between Unionists and Liberals, there was hardly more of principle than between American Republicans and Democrats—at anyrate so far as the official leadership was concerned. The Salisbury Government was really a coalition of Tories like the Cecils, Whig magnates like Lansdowne and Devonshire, and the Imperialist-Radical following of Chamberlain. The Opposition leadership was bitterly disputed between Little Englanders of the Gladstonian tradition, and out-and-out Empire men like Rosebery. One side believed in applying coercion to Catholics in Ireland, the other, though backed by the British Non-conformist interest, to Protestants. Both believed in maintaining the existing social order substantially intact; both were angling for the working-class vote by promises of social reform.

So that neither on personal nor political grounds can there be alleged any binding obligation of principle, to have kept Churchill from following his own natural bent in planning his political strategy. And if this should have resulted in his changing sides with what, from the point of view of his own interests, would have been the most brilliant timing, we may perhaps say—"So much the better for him—and for us", and leave it at that.

### 3.

At least there was never the faintest pretence of his settling down to the life of a good party man. His maiden speech made that patently clear. It was the debate on the Address, and the Government were being violently assailed for their conduct of the war. Churchill was put up to follow an extremely eloquent Opposition back bench, who had leapt into notoriety as one of the most uncompromising of the avowed pro-Boer group—David Lloyd George, a solicitor from Wales, also with a career to make. It was an unequal contest, as far as debating talent was concerned, for Churchill had as yet none of that ready flow of words that was at the other's command. His efforts were prepared and memorized long in advance, and he has confessed to having undergone agonized searchings of heart about the best way to link on his own speech to that to

which he was supposed to be replying—and Lloyd George was no easy speaker to follow.

However, this necessary start was prompted by the Member next to him, a famous old Parliamentary hand called Tommy Bowles; and when Lloyd George gracefully cut short his own speech, in order, as he said, that the House might hear a new Member, that Member was able to lead off with an apparently spontaneous little debating thrust, that might have come from Balfour himself. After that he had merely to declaim his piece with all his inbred assurance. A maiden speaker is usually on his best party behaviour; but this speech contained matter that was, to put it at the mildest, unorthodox—language about the Boers only too pointedly reminiscent of Chatham's about the American rebels. "If I were a Boer," he said, "I hope I should be fighting in the field"—whereat Joe Chamberlain, on the Treasury Bench, turned and muttered to his neighbour—"That's the way to lose seats." However, the most significant part was reserved for the end, when, after his peroration, he acknowledged the applause that greeted him from all quarters, and attributed it to "the splendid memory that many Honourable Members still preserve"—the memory of his father.

That this was the utterance of his soul, he was soon to demonstrate, in a way not to be mistaken. The chivalrous gesture towards the enemy could well be passed over, in a young enthusiast not yet broken in to party routine; but it was another thing when open mutiny was proclaimed against his own leaders on a major issue of policy. And yet to anyone who had followed his career, this was no less than might have been anticipated. For what can have been more natural than for the son to renew the selfsame challenge to Lord Salisbury and his colleagues as had brought about his father's downfall fifteen years before?

The resentment that even thus early was rising in the country against an administration which had so signally failed to make good its boast of ending the war, inevitably tended to concentrate on the War Office. That department had, not without cause, become a veritable cockshy for abuse in the services, the music-halls, the press, and the country generally, and its reform was recognized on all hands to be the most urgent, as well as the most intractable task, confronting the Government. Lord Roberts had been appointed Commander-in-Chief on his return for the purpose suggested in a musical comedy couplet:

When the sluggards he warms and the army reforms,  
Will Lord Roberts be popular then?

and Lord Salisbury was naturally anxious to reinforce him by selecting the ablest among his new promotions for what was the veritable *siege perilous* at that Cabinet board. The unfortunate recipient of this honour was Mr. St. John Brodrick, the present Lord Midleton, who, besides being recognized since his Oxford days as a

man of outstanding talent, had already served with distinction at the War Office as an under minister.

He at least faced up valiantly to the task, and by the time the army estimates were due for presentation, was able to come before the House with a comprehensive programme of reform. The feature of this that most impressed itself on the public mind, was the proposal to make a clean sweep of the chaotic arrangements that had produced such dire results in South Africa, and set up a uniform organization of six army corps, three of them to constitute a striking force ready to go anywhere and do anything, while the remainder were to be formed for home defence out of units that would have to be for the most part trained and brought up to strength after the war had broken out. It was, in principle, the system that was actually adopted in the Great War; but it was only too easy to represent it as mere window-dressing, and to point out that a great part of this imposing force only existed on paper. And indeed there was some reason for doubt whether the real trouble with the army and the War Office did not lie deeper than the Brodrick-Roberts combination had dared to envisage. What sort of army reform could it be that resurrected Buller for the command of the First Corps, or rather tried to—for the amiable purpose was defeated, with unwonted celerity, by Buller himself, who, having developed a malignant form of persecution mania against Roberts, gave it such outrageous vent at a public luncheon, as to make it imperative, at long last, to sack him.

This development, of course, had not materialized when Mr. Brodrick introduced his scheme to the House. Nor were the first reactions wholly unfavourable. It certainly looked drastic and imposing enough—on paper.

Here was a subject made for Mr. Churchill. He was a soldier who had made military affairs his special province, and had already pegged out his Parliamentary claim to it, by intervening in the case of a certain General Colville, a product of Eton and the Guards, whose repeated failure in the field had led to Lord Roberts sending him home, and who had been tactfully allowed to solace himself by a Gibraltar command. Unfortunately things came out about his performances that made his retention in that vital post too open a scandal, and Roberts was on his track, so he was turned out with an abruptness that started him airing his grievances in the press. Here the principles not only of elementary discipline, but of unfettered selection, without which there can be no sort of military efficiency, were at stake, and Churchill rubbed this in with such convincing vigour as to make the critics of the War Office action look very foolish indeed.

It must have come therefore as a painful surprise to the minister, when this hitherto excellent young man tabled an amendment to his scheme so uncompromisingly hostile, that the effect of it, if it had been carried—of which of course there could be no question—

would have been his own resignation, and probably the downfall of the Government. It was an act of breath-taking insolence, enough to detonate a rumble of premonitory thunder in *The Times* to the effect that young Mr. Churchill was repeating the most disastrous mistake in his father's career. That was exactly what he meant to do—only this time it was not going to be a mistake.

The amendment itself had to give way to one from the regular Opposition, but the speech that Churchill had long and laboriously prepared, and by which he must have known that his Parliamentary reputation would be made or marred, would do none the worse for that. He lost no time in defining his position. He was taking up the quarrel with the War Office at the exact point his father had had to drop it. The dramatic piquancy of the situation was enhanced by the fact that Mr. Brodrick had been at that time Financial Secretary to the War Office, and as such in the forefront of the battle against the Exchequer. And surely even the outraged ministerial supporters must have been thrilled in their own despite, to hear the son quoting, without reference, from his father's letter of resignation—"Wise words", he said, "stand the test of time"—and proclaiming his intention, "after an interval of fifteen years, to lift again the tattered flag I found lying on a stricken field".

It was a startling position, to say the least, that he was taking. To his constituents he had been a young hero; to the House he was already known as a soldier, not to speak of a militarist. He could hardly open his mouth without some martial phrase about flags and fields and fighting; his plea for the Boers was one of soldierly comradeship; his recipe for beating them was to damn the expense, and employ overwhelming quantities of men and munitions; and yet here he was passionately maintaining that an annual expenditure, apart from the war, of thirty solid millions—think of those figures today!—on the land forces, was wicked waste, and a direct challenge to British naval supremacy—"military hydrophobia" he called it in one of those striking word-coinages of which his mintage was to be so prolific. Let England concentrate on her fleet; behind that iron wall she could rest secure. The mere idea of raising an expeditionary force to take part in a European war filled him with horror; he waxed prophetic in his prevision of a war of peoples more terrible than one of kings, more vindictive than one of cabinets, and ending "in the ruin of the vanquished and the scarcely less fatal dislocation and exhaustion of the conquerors".

In his peroration he struck an even higher note. He appealed to moral force, that divine fountain, as he phrased it, of earthly power, that which would have done more to protect the Boers than all their cannon and commanders, that which in the dark days of defeat had shielded England from European intervention, and which she was now in danger of diminishing, perhaps of destroying, for the sake of Mr. Brodrick's costly and expensive military toys. It hardly seems to have struck him—or indeed anyone else—that in strict logic, he

had undermined the basis of his previous argument, since there would seem to be no line of moral demarcation that one can draw between naval and military toys. But he was no Balfour, to waste logic on Englishmen. And yet perhaps there is another and a deeper logic, that of life itself, to which a man may be blindly, rightly, true. This speech was, to use a phrase of his own, climactic. He had, at the outset, taken his political life in his hands and gambled with it recklessly. But the gamble had come off. His Parliamentary reputation was made. He had arrived where his father had been in the early 'eighties, and made it humanly certain that nothing but himself could prevent him from rising to high, and perhaps even to the highest office.

It is easy to exaggerate the effects of Parliamentary oratory. For the most part it follows a pre-determined course; the Government defends, the Opposition attacks, and their respective followers, inside and outside the House, credit their own champions with having scored. But there are occasions when the balance of opinion is so delicately poised that a speech, particularly if it comes from an unexpected quarter, may give it a decisive tilt. And it would seem as if Churchill had hit upon one of these rare, psychological moments for his intervention, so that the effect of his words was to start an invincible and growing prejudice against Mr. Brodrick's scheme, and against Mr. Brodrick himself. Once such a suggestion gets fairly planted, there is no means of combating it. The man in the street, who had never studied the scheme except in the headlines, or at best by glancing down the columns of his morning paper, soon got it firmly into his head that he had discovered the whole thing to be humbug. Brodrick's army corps, even Brodrick's new cap, which the army has worn ever since, became a common butt for ridicule. But unlike the cap, the army corps were never allowed to materialize. And Mr. Brodrick's own position at the War Office, to which he had worked up by years of meritorious service, rapidly became impossible.

Nor did the trouble end here. For the Government's own prestige had been grievously impaired by the torpedoing of its first notable venture. It was more palpably than ever slipping down an inclined plane. And the spirit of Randolph, unless it had been very greatly chastened in its new abode, must have rejoiced greatly at this settlement of an old account—or at least of its first instalment.

#### 4.

From the standpoint of political strategy, the position attained by Mr. Churchill, as the result of his attack on the Brodrick reforms, must be judged most enviable. He was free now to move in any direction he chose; for though he had successfully asserted the right to be his own unfettered master, he had not ceased to be a member



of the Unionist Party, nor had the leaders, to whom his mutiny had caused such grave embarrassment, made the faintest attempt to bring him to book. Much might be forgiven to a young man's filial affection, especially when that young man's party—and nuisance—value had been so dramatically vindicated. The consequence was one that he of all people was best fitted to appreciate. He was henceforth less in the position of a subordinate, than of a free auxiliary who knew his worth and could put his own price on his support.

For the present all he had to do was to remain true to what ought to be the principles of an enlightened Toryism, and go straight ahead in the way his father had trod. The two years that intervened between the introduction of the Brodrick scheme, and the first mutterings of the Tariff Reform controversy, were, on the party front, a time of suspense and indecision. The great Unionist majority continued to function with reasonable smoothness, and the notorious cleavage of the opposition to be at best but thinly patched over. The war dragged its miserable course right into the middle of 1902, though it would have been possible to have ended it on honourable terms early in 1901, when negotiations with the Boer leaders broke down on Sir Alfred Milner's obstinacy in refusing an amnesty to combatant Boers of British allegiance, a piece of insensate pedantry against which Churchill had long warned his countrymen. For his part he continued true to his twin principles of putting every ounce of strength behind the British punch in the field, and sparing no effort to come to the speediest possible understanding that should convert a gallant enemy into a loyal friend, and contented associate of the Empire. He would have liked, as he said, to end it all by a handshake. Meanwhile he lost no opportunity of dissociating himself from the policy of diehard Jingoism which found only too much favour on the Unionist benches. No pro-Boer could have been more righteously indignant against such embryo Hunnishness as the indiscriminate burning of farms, and the murder, under military law, of technically rebel commanders. The life of one of these he pulled wires successfully to save.

Meanwhile, he contrived to follow in his father's footsteps with astonishing fidelity. A new Fourth Party took life from his inspiration. There is perhaps something in the nature of Conservatism that tends to the discouragement of youthful ambition, and certainly the Hotel Cecil displayed no eagerness to provide accommodation for new arrivals. But there were quite a number of energetic young men who were ill disposed to sit humbly on the back benches until some one should happen to think of them. It would be better to keep the management reminded of their presence, even if this should involve making themselves a pretty considerable nuisance. Also, it would keep them from dying of boredom. It only needed so forceful a personality as that of Mr. Churchill, to give unified direction to these scattered energies. A sort of informal club came into existence,

whose great feature consisted in periodical dinners, to which the leading celebrities would be invited, in turn, as guests of honour, and royally entertained. Even the party mandarins, to whom their proceedings were such a sore trial, thawed under this treatment. These pleasant young men had a way with them. Old Lord Salisbury, when he was approached, insisted on their becoming his guests, and gave them the best of his wit and wisdom. It was rumoured that he himself gave them the name by which they were best known, that of the Hughligans.

This was after his own son, Lord Hugh Cecil, also one of the rising young men of the party, and to all appearance destined to as brilliant a career as Winston himself, whom he greatly surpassed in those attainments of formal scholarship which the latter was painfully conscious of lacking. But Lord Hugh was a High Tory of a very old school, that put its leading emphasis on High Churchmanship, and he was less inwardly attracted to the problems of mundane statesmanship, than to those fine technical loyalties and aspirations that signify so much to the more combative sort of priest, but are Greek to the ordinary layman. He probably would have not been dissatisfied, could he have known that his final destination was not Downing Street, but the Provost's Lodge at Eton. But at present he was just about as "Hughligan" a Parliamentary freelance as Winston himself. There was Ian Malcolm, one of the keenest brains of the party; there were rising hopes of the great Houses of Stanley and Percy, the latter a youth who seemed as plainly destined as Winston himself to set his mark on history, if he could only have lived. And as time went on fresh recruits were attracted, including gallant Jack Seely, from the Isle of Wight, who, as a light-hearted gambler with death, was about the one man who could claim a record to compare with that of Winston himself. Touching in its appropriateness was the adhesion of old Sir John Gorst, one of the original four of Lord Randolph's Fourth Party, and whose loyalty not even death had affected.

By the end of these two years Winston Churchill had become the recognized leader of a somewhat loosely compacted group of some score of Unionists, united in the determination to ginger up the official leadership, and impart a sorely needed progressive drive to a policy that seemed more and more inclined to stick fast in the ruts of reactionary conservatism.

Meanwhile Churchill's reputation was steadily consolidating, and the man in the street was beginning to recognize him for something more than a political nine days' wonder. Perhaps the best indication of this is supplied by his biography in *The Daily Mail Year Book*. That of 1902, after describing him as "world famous at 27", and summarizing his military career, merely adds that "he has already made his mark in Parliament". In 1904 (which of course signifies the Autumn of 1903) he has become "one of the most conspicuous figures of public life", and it is noted that "since entering Parliament has greatly

improved as a debater, and reproduces that fearless independence of party which so distinguished his father”.

But what was the impression of those who saw behind the scenes of public life, and could judge of him from direct contact? First we may cite an opinion of that shrewd and cynical old Worldly Wiseman, Sir William Harcourt: “The want of judgment of the fellow”, he says, “is despairing, but there is a good deal of force in his oratory.”\*

Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, in his diary, records of Dillon, one of the leading Irish Nationalists, also a keen and experienced observer of men, that he expressed—this in March 1903—“a high opinion of Winston Churchill’s ability, but says he is even more unscrupulous than his father was”.

Against which we may set Mr. Churchill’s own account of his motives:

“I found myself”, he records in his autobiography, “differing from both parties in various ways, and I was so untutored as to suppose that all I had to do was to think out what was right and express it fearlessly. I thought that loyalty in this outweighed all other loyalties.”

It would be not merely ungenerous, but inept, to question the good faith of this.

Here then we have the basis of three separate theories to account for Mr. Churchill’s strikingly original interpretation of his duty as Unionist representative of a great constituency. Was he merely following the erratic course of a young man with a glib tongue and no judgment? Or was he working out a deliberate and entirely unscrupulous scheme for his own personal advancement? Or again, was his divergence from the normal that of a man of unswerving principle, determined to walk in the light of his own moral consciousness, and follow the vision wherever it might lead?

Each of these, we must remember, was sponsored by a man whose judgment is entitled to more than ordinary consideration. And a case could assuredly be made out for each of the three, that could cover such facts as we know and from which no one could differ.

But we may thank God that human nature, and most emphatically of all in its heroic form, is too vast to be comprehended in any such compact rationalizations. We who write history suffer from the fact that our own stature is so seldom commensurate with those of its outstanding geniuses. We abstract from their personalities no more than we can receive into the limited compass of our own. But not even genius, it seems, can find any better way of explaining itself to the world. It is usually wise enough not to try.

Heroism, or genius in life, can never be rationalized, because if it were rational it would cease to be heroic.

Try to explain why Cæsar went to Britain or Napoleon to Moscow, and how thin and unpalatable it will sound! They themselves could not have revealed more than that they could not help it. The

\* *The Life of Sir William Harcourt*, by A. G. Gardiner, Vol. II, p. 591.

demon in them would give them no peace till they did what they did.

Winston Churchill was possessed of such a demon. Every day, it would seem by all accounts of him, he had to relieve himself of a superflux of crude vitality far in excess of most men's weekly quota. During all this phase of his career, the amount of mental and muscular exertion he contrived to put forth is staggering to contemplate. Not only in the House, the committee rooms, the lobbies, and through the constantly renewed ordeal of all-night sittings, but as a lecturer and platform orator and, not less, as an author—for only one who has worked in this field can appreciate what is implied in constructing a work on the scale of Lord Randolph's biography—he had more than an ordinary mortal's share of toil and sweat. But this did not suffice him. His enthusiasm for polo was undiminished, and he had added to this the even more strenuous performance of a full season's foxhunting ritual. Add to this that he threw himself into the pleasures of social intercourse and good living with the same zest, and you will have some faint conception of what vast pressure of energy he had to concentrate and harness to fruitful service, unless it were to burst forth its own vent in sheer waste and devastation.

To have resigned himself to the trivial round and common task of the reliable party man, accepting his principles from the Central Office, and his voting orders from the Whip in patient expectation of favours some day to come, would have been torture inconceivable. He had principles of his own to vindicate, a task of filial piety to perform, and nothing should stand in his way. He had also to get to the top of the tree in the shortest possible time, "D.V. or otherwise", and that too he might reckon to be a point of the highest principle. But there was another streak running through his composition that was neither ambitious nor crusading, but one of sheer, exuberant irresponsibility—that which in his boyhood had impelled him to shout "St. George, St. Dunstan, and the Devil!" in the course of a solemn football match, and take a more than fifty per cent chance of breaking his neck, for the fun of it. There was, and is, something of the boy in him still; perhaps that impelling demon of his was not one, but Legion—and included Puck.

## 5.

During 1902, there were plain signs that the period of comparative stabilization in the party war was not destined to last. In the early summer a new vista had been opened by the end of the now universally detested war in South Africa. The country had heaved a great sigh of relief, which was mingled with no thanks to the Government, and tried to forget the whole sorry business in the excitement of the Coronation. Meanwhile old Lord Salisbury, who had only stuck to his Premiership so as to preserve the show of continuity during the war, gladly transferred the burden to his nephew's

shoulders, and, having nothing to detain him in the world, went home to sleep with his fathers. And though he had been little more than a figurehead since the election, it was felt that now he was gone, something of stability and cohesion had gone out of the Government.

The dynamic force was more than ever imparted by Chamberlain, and that master of political strategy must have perceived that the pendulum had begun to swing against the Unionist cause with a momentum that, unless it were checked in time, would become irresistible. It was no more his way, than it would have been Churchill's, to stand passive until the situation had got out of hand. Some vigorous and dramatic counteraction was called for, that should enable his side to regain the initiative, and open up a new front on ground of its own choosing.

That April, the Hughligans had dined him, and though he had started the meal in a decidedly ruffled mood, he had mellowed by the end of it, and on bidding them farewell, had presented them with what he described as a priceless secret: "Tariffs. These are the politics of the future, and of the near future." In May of the following year, his meaning had become apparent. He used language both in and out of the Commons which plainly foreshadowed his intention of binding the Empire together by a system of preferential tariffs, involving, as a necessary consequence, a revolution in the fiscal system of the country, and a challenge to what had been for the last two generations the sacred dogma of Free Trade.

Nobody was quicker to grasp the significance of this than Churchill himself; it was a change, he said, not only in the historic English parties, but in the conditions of public life, involving the disappearance of the old Conservative Party, with its religious principles and constitutional convictions—a somewhat startling way of foreboding the reversion of that party to its historic faith in Protection. But it was not his way to bother about such fine points of historic verisimilitude. His object, as always, was strictly practical; that of defining his own attitude, in the most public and unmistakable way possible, to the new situation. It was plainly within his right to do so, for in no sense could he have been said to have signed on for this new venture to which the Radical from Birmingham hoped to commit the Tory Party. The constituency that had elected him was in industrial Lancashire, where Free Trade was almost as much of an established faith as Christianity; and not the faintest suggestion had been breathed, at that time, of any intention to depart from it. Could he, without the most cynical breach of trust, levy war on it as their representative?

So much for the first and formal loyalty to which, as one of His Majesty's Faithful Commons, he was pledged. But what of the far deeper allegiance that was with him not a matter of honour but of inward compulsion? What of the Randolphian tradition? The nature of that he indicated, in a speech at the Constitutional Club, in which he urged the party to graft on to its Toryism the once

Radical principles of peace, retrenchment, and reform. He had even evinced a certain openness, in debate, to the idea of preferential treatment for the Colonies. But in this new raging and revolutionary propaganda of Chamberlain's, he could see only an attempt to rush the country into a scheme of wasteful and costly imperialism, dominated by competing private interests, and postponing indefinitely those measures on which his heart was set, for raising the condition of the people. Nay, by putting taxes on their vital necessities, it would tend to force that condition still lower.

So much for what we may call the public aspect of it. But how would it be likely to affect him as the strategist of his own career? For that we have as good a pointer as we could wish in a letter that he wrote on September 1, to his father's old friend, the Duke of Devonshire, and in which he says:

"We are on the eve of a gigantic political landslide. I don't think Balfour and those about him realize how far the degeneration of the forces of Unionism has proceeded, and how tremendous the counter current is going to be." \*

Events were soon to demonstrate how justly he had appreciated the situation. Ever since Balfour had taken over the Premiership, the evidence of by-elections had hinted at something like an incipient dry rot of Unionism. But instead of arresting this, the effect of Chamberlain's latest move had been to bring the party to the verge of disruption. In the Cabinet, in the Houses, in the country, there was a large section that was Conservative in the truest sense of the word, and to whom this new order from Birmingham was too large an order to stomach. But even more powerful forces had rallied with fanatical zeal to the novel idea of a crusade for customs duties. Between the two Mr. Balfour's dilemma was cruel. To his subtle and philosophic intelligence, this was no case for excited declamation, but rather for dispassionate enquiry; nor were Tariffs either a panacea or an abomination to him. So he drafted a memorandum for the Cabinet which was a good deal above most of their heads, suggesting a very tentative and limited advance in the direction indicated by Chamberlain.

Economics apart, he had his duty as leader of his party to consider; and he would be no Peel or Gladstone, to split and thereby cripple it not for a Parliament, but a generation. Only a man of iron nerve and complete indifference to obloquy could for two years and a half have succeeded in holding the balance between Protectionist "Whole-hoggers", and what an earlier age would have known as "Abhorrrers". But the captain's innings, that infuriated the gallery, saved the side. The party went to, and emerged from, inevitable defeat at the polls, substantially intact.

The crisis came to a head in the middle of September, when not only Chamberlain, but three Free Trade members of the Cabinet, resigned their offices; to be followed, as soon as his comatose

\* *Life of the Duke of Devonshire* by Bernard Holland, Vol. II, p. 320.

mentality could adapt itself to the situation, by the Duke of Devonshire.

That, of course, meant reconstructing an administration, from which the weight and prestige had departed. Now, if ever, would seem to have been the time for enlisting the best young blood in the party to remedy the default of its elder statesmen. And what more obvious choice could have presented itself than that of the now famous young Member for Oldham? If only for the sake of keeping this terrible soldier of fortune true to their own cause, and denying his prowess, of which such dire proof had already been afforded, to the enemy, common prudence would seem to have dictated his promotion.

That was obvious enough, one would have thought, to appeal to the meanest intelligence. But as far as we know, it did not even dawn upon what will probably rank as the keenest Parliamentary intellect since that of Disraeli. Mr. Balfour displayed not the faintest sense of the urgency of the crisis. He moved up safe party men of the most unimpressive stamp to fill the vacancies in his Cabinet—the result was described, with a good deal of point, as a second eleven. No notice whatever was taken of the Hughligans, except that Percy was moved from one under-secretaryship to another. As for Winston, if he was his father's son, Balfour was his uncle's nephew, and the last man in the world to put a premium on mutiny, or encourage the boil on his neck to gather.

There was something rootedly antipathetic in their two temperaments—they were, so to speak, differently geared. They could admire and even, in a way, like each other, at a distance; but bring them together and—as is the way in unhappy marriages—they could not help jarring. For it was Churchill's nature to discharge his energy into action, with the minimum of delay. He must always be making, fighting, creating. When he could find no other outlet, he must even be fidgeting; for it was said of him that he could not sit still without doing things with his hands, even at the expense of any piece of paper there might be available. It was his strength and—as old Harcourt had divined—his besetting danger; "the fellow's lack of judgment". With Balfour, it was just the other way about. When roused, no man could act with more energy and decision; but he felt no compulsion to do so. What came into his mind he delighted to keep there; combining, assimilating, fructifying. He was one of those who, like the inhabitants of Dante's loftiest circle, find their heaven in contemplation. Between his languor and the other's impetuosity there could be nothing but discord. It was as irresistible a temptation for Churchill to bait Balfour, as it was for Balfour to ignore Churchill. And probably if he had taken him into his Government, it would only have been Randolph and Salisbury over again.

Whether Churchill, if pressed, would have accepted the invitation, is another matter. But that same constant desire of his to find scope

for his energies, in the most fruitful possible field, must have made it hard indeed to resist. True, he must have realized that the Unionists were an army marching to defeat. But the man who with a crippled arm had carried a polo team to victory, might have imagined himself capable of infusing that same will to win into the Tory ranks; let them only accept his father's panacea even at this late hour—go all out for democracy, trust the people, trust him. . . . As for any little difficulty about adjusting his principles to those of Joe, he had never been a stickler for pedantic consistency, where some practical good was to be attained. And of all games a waiting game was the one least congenial to him.

But Balfour, who was capable of seeing so many things to which others were blind, was incapable of seeing in Winston a potentially winning card for his otherwise trumpleless hand. It might have been a stroke of genius to take up Winston and play him—but it was not *his* genius. Chamberlain would have acted differently, "Winston", he told Mrs. Asquith, long afterwards when, laid on the shelf by paralysis, he could look back in calmness on these days of turmoil, "is the cleverest of all the young men, and the mistake Arthur made was letting him go."

So the choice of making the great refusal was never presented to him. When some day he completes this section of his biography, it is to be hoped he will let us know what that choice would have been—if he knows himself for certain.

## 6.

Thus it turned out, the great refusal was not Churchill's, but Balfour's. And any blindness the Premier may have had to the consequences was soon to fall from his eyes. It was only a frayed thread that had ever bound Randolph's son to the party that had rejected his father. And now that the party had thus pointedly rejected *him*, the thread was snapped. He was free to take his own part, and dispose of his allegiance as he would. For it was open to him to plead that it was not he who had forsaken Toryism, but the Tories themselves. What part had they, or he, in this new Brummagem gospel of dear food and cheap profits? Let them see to it!

He had waited too long already. For Joe was not the man to let the grass grow under his feet. The whirlwind campaign had already swept over Oldham. Even while Chamberlain still remained in the Cabinet, in nominal harmony with his Free Trade colleagues, his Birmingham Tariff Committee had begun to flood the constituencies with its propaganda. Bitter complaints were reaching Churchill of his central association, and even his ward committees, having protectionist leaflets dumped upon them for distribution, as if they were officially sponsored by the party. He could, as he informed the



Duke,\* at any time have carried a resolution authorizing him to distribute Free Trade literature, and no other. But until Balfour had definitely showed his hand, he had held his own, and refrained from taking the step that would have led to negotiations with the local Liberals for the defence of the Free Trade citadel. But, to anticipate a phrase that had not yet become notorious, his patience was almost exhausted.

The September crash eliminated the "almost". Balfour still refused to show his hand to the country, but he had made it only too clear how he stood towards Winston. It was as if the younger man did not exist. Clearly it was time for the elder to be reminded of that existence in a way not to be forgotten. The buttons were off the foils—it was war now *à outrance* against the supplanters of Free Trade and Randolph Churchill.

Still the open and formal breach with the party had not taken place. For the moment Churchill's position was simply that of a militant Free Trader, and an inexorable opponent of Chamberlain and all his works. And Chamberlain's crusade had not yet received the official endorsement of the party. But what did that avail when it was everywhere openly stated, and nowhere explicitly denied, that Chamberlain and Balfour were acting in full accord, and that the Premier's attitude to his former colleague was what we should now define as that of an actively non-belligerent ally, who had merely remained behind in order that he might wean the party from any Free Trade prejudices, and, at the right moment, bring its united strength to the reinforcement of the Birmingham storm troops? His suave and transparent evasiveness was particularly calculated to infuriate a young man whose action even at the least scrupulous was always emphatically direct. And we know what he thought of Balfour, even when, after his death, he could look back upon him with full appreciation of the nobility of his intellect and the charm of his personality. He was conscious of a certain underlying ruthlessness; the quality of those bland and serpentine statesmen of the Renaissance, the Princes of Machiavelli.

With Chamberlain it was different. From that invaluable source, Blunt's diaries, we learn how Winston's attitude to him at this time was one "of mingled contempt and admiration, contempt for the man and admiration for his astuteness and audacity".† The contempt is curious, and one may suspect gains a little colour from Blunt's own prejudice; and we must remember that Churchill was scarcely in a mood to take a judicial view of Joe's recent proceedings. But the admiration we may be sure was fundamental, for it is what Winston had never failed to accord to a doughty opponent. Chamberlain was of the same fighting species as his own; between them it would be blow for blow, and thrust for thrust, in good, joyous interchange. As Chamberlain stormed from city to city, trying to carry the country with him by the sheer force of his enthusiasm, Winston

\* *Op. cit.* p. 319.

† 31st Oct. 1903.

dogged his steps like an avenging fury, applying the antidote of his own oratory. He even had the audacity to penetrate after him into his stronghold at Birmingham, where the Chamberlain cult was of a fierce fanaticism that did not stop short of mob violence. A crowd of the same sort that had forced Mr. Lloyd George, not so long before, to flee in the disguise of a policeman, was ready to apply similar treatment to him; but the man who had not quailed under a hail of Mauser bullets, was only stimulated by the prospect of a rough house in the Midlands, and those who had come to mob remained to cheer—for even the British rough is not without a sporting appreciation of pluck.

That Autumn he and Hugh Cecil braved the fury of Chamberlain's supporters, who flooded the annual Conservative Conference at Sheffield. But that partnership was not destined to last, since Lord Hugh was a Tory of the Tories, who would have thought it foul scorn to be forced out of the party by a Radical interloper. But Churchill was bound by no such inhibitions, and was now so openly hostile not only to Chamberlain, but to Balfour, whom he had already taunted with trying to muzzle the Commons, that his formal transfer of allegiance could plainly not be long delayed.

He was swept rapidly along towards that consummation. He carried his advocacy of Free Trade to such uncompromising lengths as to intervene at a by-election against the officially sponsored party candidate, and to urge that Free Traders of all parties should form a solid front against the common enemy. And lest there should be any doubt as to his meaning, he followed this up, on the platform, by thanking God for the existence of a Liberal Party.

It is small wonder that after this, the Oldham Conservative Association should have formally repudiated and disowned him. He was completely unrepentant. He had his answer. It was not he who had betrayed his principles, those that had been put before the country at the election. It was Balfour.

## 7.

The Session of 1904 opened in an atmosphere of tense expectancy. It was not without reason that Churchill declared that the very air of Westminster smelt of dissolution. It seemed almost inconceivable that Balfour would be able to carry on. Such a spectacle had never been seen as that of a Prime Minister defiantly maintaining a non-committal attitude, and exercising every resource of subtle ingenuity to avoid defining his position on the burning question of the hour. Such an attitude was bound to be furiously unpopular in the country; for there is nothing that an Englishman more resents in his public men than any suspicion of "foxing". Every by-election was now a verdict of cumulative condemnation of the Government. The most sanguine of partisans could not pretend that it retained any sort of mandate from an electorate that was mani-

festly straining at the leash to throw it out. Even Chamberlain was under no sort of illusion about this. He calculated on losing one election, and coming in on the back swing of the pendulum.

It would appear that Balfour's plain course under these circumstances would have been to end an impossible situation by going to the country, before the landslide had become an avalanche. And it is safe to say that any man but Balfour would have done so. But Balfour had his own reasons for sticking to office for as long as his majority would sustain him. Of all the contending chiefs, he was the least excited about the fiscal dispute. No doubt Chamberlain was right in principle; the hard-and-fast dogma of Free Trade was out of date, and though import duties might not be a short cut to Utopia, they might, in moderation, have their advantages for the country and the empire. But they were not the only, or the most important things for the King's Ministers to consider. They had on their hands a great re-orientation of foreign policy. An alliance with Japan had already been concluded, marking the break with Salisbury's policy of splendid isolation. Negotiations for an entente with France, that would not fall far short of an informal alliance against Germany, were actively in hand, and to have quitted office before they were safely concluded would have been little short of criminal. That policy had to be guided and consolidated through its first delicate stages, and along with that went an overhauling of the national defence organization in which Balfour was keenly interested, and that it would be perilous to leave to a party whose rank and file was swelled with peace-at-any-price enthusiasts, pledged to cut down expenditure on armaments to the bone regardless of every other consideration.

Balfour could have pleaded, had he thought it worth while to do so, that by his delaying tactics he was not only preserving intact the unity of his party for a more propitious season, but that he was performing an indispensable service to his country. But to those not in the secret his conduct had all the appearance of cynical legerdemain. Certainly it presented an opportunity of which Winston Churchill would have been more than human if he had failed to take advantage. To an ambitious young politician, there is no surer way of establishing his reputation than by the sedulous aspersion of the most commanding figure available. The victim becomes the involuntary advertiser of his assailant. It was thus that Disraeli had established himself at the expense of Peel, and Randolph Churchill at that of Gladstone. The younger Churchill was an expert in this technique; he had practised it with conspicuous success already on Brodrick and Chamberlain. But surely never had a statesman presented so unmissable a target as his still nominal leader.

The session was not long under way, before the passions that had been engendered found vent in the first of the series of undignified brawls by which the proceedings of the Commons were to be periodically enlivened in the course of the next two years. The

Opposition, now heartened and united by the certainty of victory, and burning to speed the hour of it, were ready to pick up any stick to beat the Government with, and they had found an excellent one in the importation of Chinese coolies to work the mines in the Transvaal, which the Liberal propaganda represented as a revival of the slave trade. A vote of censure had been moved on this by the Opposition, and Major Seely, on whom his Unionist allegiance sat as lightly as it did on Churchill, got up to support it. This aroused such indignation on the Government benches, that a concerted effort was made first to talk, and then to shout him down. It need hardly be said that this brought Churchill into the fray, shouting at Mr. Speaker that he could not hear his honourable friend owing to the vulgar clamour of the Conservative Party, to which some outraged old Tory rose admirably by accusing Churchill of having used the vulgarest expression of all. The sequel was an attempt of the Opposition to howl down the innocent Mr. Balfour, though with his persuasive charm he did succeed eventually in getting himself a hearing.

It was only a few days later that a second incident revealed the fury that had been rising to a head against Winston himself. It was the motion for the Easter adjournment; the leaders had duly performed their part, and it was late in the afternoon. Nothing could have been more natural than that when Mr. Churchill rose to continue the debate, Mr. Balfour, who could not be expected to remain till dinner-time glued to his seat, should have risen from the Treasury Bench and lounged off, presumably in quest of tea. It was equally to be expected that quite a number of Members should have risen at the same time. But their example seems to have started one of those herd impulses that communicate themselves by a sort of telepathy; here was the chance of relieving their feelings by a concerted boycott. Not a sentence had been uttered before practically the whole mass of Government supporters, many of them elderly gentlemen of the utmost dignity and importance, were crowding to the door, and some of those already there turning to beckon up laggards, or even to make derisive demonstrations. It was, of course, a better service to Churchill himself than thunders of applause could have been—his lonely eminence had added a good cubit to his political stature.

And as on the occasion of the very similar impulse that had caused the wrecking of the partition at the Empire, he knew instinctively how to turn the opportunity to his advantage. With Hugh Cecil his solitary audience on the now deserted Government benches, he proceeded, amid the cheers of a delighted Opposition, to thunder defiance at the Conservative Party, and to scarify their leader, in the nation-wide publicity that they themselves had been kind enough to secure for him. He offered to resign his seat at Oldham and take the verdict of his constituents—if they dared challenge it. The time had come, he said, when the House should be freed from their shift

policy of equivocal evasion ; this unsatisfactory, unprecedented, unconstitutional position in which it had been placed by the failure of the Prime Minister to give any light on the question that was vexing the country, this failure that had changed Churchill himself from a supporter to—it was out now! an avowed opponent.

Never had the art of making enemies been practised with more consummate address. And yet in less than a month an incident occurred that threw a curious light on this game of gentlemen, in which passions labelled political were kept in closed compartments, isolated from the deeper feelings. The occasion was one of a debate on a novel and somewhat ominous issue, that of the right of Trades Unions to disclaim responsibility for injury inflicted under their auspices on those who defied their authority by refusing to join in strikes—a right long tacitly conceded, but now traversed by a judicial decision. A motion from the Liberal benches to restore the *status quo ante* brought Churchill to his feet with a speech that showed how far his cult of Tory democracy had carried him in the direction of the ultra-Radical Left. He launched out far beyond the limits of the rather equivocal claim before the House, into a plea for the cause of Labour itself, that resembled nothing so much as the tocsin sounded, early in the previous century, by Lord Byron, to his amazed peers, on behalf of the Luddite rioters. Let them consider whether, in view of the influence in their own House of company promoters, rail, landed, liquor, and in fact vested interests of all kinds, that of Labour on the course of legislation were not ridiculously small—and then, at the climax of his peroration, he came to a sudden stop in mid sentence—started again—stopped, and looked helplessly round. In an instant, politics were suspended. The very men who had so recently staged a public demonstration against him, and whom he had twitted and tormented so mercilessly, felt his embarrassment as their own, and encouraged him with kindly applause. But a light had, for the moment, gone out in him, and with a helpless gesture, and a murmured apology to the House, he resumed his seat, amid perhaps greater, and certainly more general applause, than would have greeted the most triumphant conclusion. It was an incident that would have been incredible of the all-in political wrestling of Continental assemblies, and one which shows the Mother of Parliaments in her most endearing aspect ; though a cynic might be tempted to ask whether combatants whose hostility can be so spontaneously and instantly suspended, can be really quite as much in earnest as they profess to be. A game may be gentlemanly, because it is a game ; but a game is not the real thing.

This was the 23rd of April, when he was still in that state of transition represented by his speaking from the Government side of the House, though from below the gangway. He had still, before he completed the now inevitable change over, to show his hand in a most significant way. In his opposition to the Brodrick reforms, he **had** professed himself a little army, because a big navy, man. But

now he came out with equal decisiveness for cutting down the navy in proportion. The Russo-Japanese War was on, and the Russian flagship at Port Arthur had just been sent to the bottom by a mine. Churchill propounded the idea of signaling this event by striking a battleship out of the British naval programme. When such sentiments were rife in the Opposition, Balfour may perhaps have had qualms, that were not wholly partisan, about letting them into power at a time when the first clouds of a more terrible storm than that Eastern typhoon, were already above the horizon.

By the end of May, Churchill was a full-fledged Liberal, and with his instinct for the dramatic gesture, walked into the House, and, after an appropriate pause, proceeded to seat himself next to that other live wire of Liberalism, Mr. Lloyd George. It was the corner seat below the gangway, which, in his Fourth Party days, had been filled by Lord Randolph Churchill.

Meanwhile, the value attached to Churchill was signaled by the number of constituencies that were tumbling over one another to secure him as their candidate for the next election; for the Conservative Association had, by their own action, severed his ties with Oldham. He showed his sound strategic instinct in choosing North-West Manchester, a veritable Unionist stronghold, whose Member had, in 1900, been returned unopposed. But then Manchester was the Mecca of the Free Trade Islam. Success there was as safe as it would be sensational.

## 8.

The Unionists were not long to be left in doubt of what they had lost in letting go Churchill. That solitary lapse of his had, if anything, only strengthened his position by adding a human touch to what may have struck some observers as a rather too hard and aggressively virile personality. It was soon evident that this moment of weakness was symptomatic of no sort of breakdown, and had resulted in not the least weakening of that boundless self-confidence of his. The simple and sufficient explanation was that he had been drawing the bow too tight even for him, and that his toughness was not inconsistent with his being extremely high-strung. Anyhow, it was among the greatest of his mental assets that he was capable of profiting by his mistakes. He had perhaps been adapting himself a little too fast to a more elastic kind of oratory than that of his painfully memorized set pieces, and his old enemy, tongue-tiedness, had avenged itself on his presumptuousness. If so, he would have to go carefully with his improvisations in future.

We must picture him at this time as a compact, stockish man, of no very impressive presence, and already beginning to show the first signs of middle age. His hair had begun to thin, and he had even developed the suspicion of a stoop, the first signs that the pace of life was beginning to tell; but once get him talking, and it was evident

that his energy and alertness—all that has been comprehended under the expression *élan vital*—were not only unimpaired, but more abundant than ever.

Those within the circle of his personal acquaintance knew him for a conversationalist in whose presence there was never a dull moment—not indeed with the more than feminine gift that Balfour possessed for drawing out the best in others; nature had formed him of the giving rather than the receiving tribe—but a giver of what royal munificence! As a speaker, too, in spite of that one lapse, he was more and more beginning to find his true form, and to conquer that defect of speech that is so seldom conquered. It was set fair, full speed ahead, to all outward seeming, on the great adventure of his career.

He lost no time in setting about his former comrades and their leader. Indeed it may be said that his Parliamentary career during these two last years of Balfour's Premiership was marked by one continual series of alarms and excursions. It was of course no new thing for Parliamentary passions to get out of control; it had taken all the finesse of a Hampden to prevent the debate on the Grand Remonstrance from developing into a bloody battle on the floor of the House. But in the great days of the Victorian age, a high seriousness, not only in the Commons, but in the country, had invested the proceedings of legislators. Debates had been carefully reported in the press, and studied with equal care by the members of a comparatively educated electorate. On more than one occasion they had prevented, or precipitated, the fall of a government.

But a change had become noticeable by the beginning of a new century. A subtle poison had been infused into the Parliamentary organism by Parnell and his following of Irish patriots, who, not having a Parliament of their own, had set themselves deliberately to wreck that in which they were perforce included, by defying all those genteel conventions of the Parliamentary game by which the unique dignity of the Commons had so long been maintained; and Randolph Churchill had demonstrated only too plainly how these new methods had ceased to be an Irish monopoly. And in the Edwardian age, high seriousness about Parliamentary or any other proceedings had ceased to be in vogue. The new, cheap press catered for a just literate public that would only have been bored by the reasoned arguments of statesmen, but to whom the report of a row in the House, duly stunted and headlined, was almost as attractive as that of a juicy murder, or sex drama in high life. And it was inevitable that legislators themselves, especially those of them with careers in the making, should have played up to the tastes of their constituents.

One need not be too hard on them, when one reflects that the proceedings in which they were engaged were becoming so divorced from either sense or reality, that they must have been almost insufferably boring to anyone of the remotest intelligence. On the

Irish precedent, it was no longer the prime aim of the Opposition to overcome the Ministers in argument, but by exhausting every device of obstruction to prevent any important legislation from being passed at all. The result was that any government that did not want to see its work, and public business, completely stultified, was bound to cut short the otherwise interminable cackle by employing the machinery devised by no less a champion of freedom than Gladstone, and proceeding to the business of voting, often before the best part of the measure had been debated at all; whereupon it became the pose of the Opposition to make an intolerable grievance of such infringement of the liberty of debate, preferably by creating a scene in the House.

This atmosphere of unreality was heightened in the abnormal state of affairs created by Balfour's tactics of maintaining himself in office by the brute force of his majority, after he had notoriously lost the support of the electorate; and still more by his determination to avoid showing his hand on the fiscal question. Under these circumstances it had become the passionate desire of the Opposition to drive him from office by any means possible, and they were thus ready to hail with joy this terrible young man who was game to proceed to all lengths in the good cause. For Winston Churchill had inherited from his father the determination to stick at nothing, when it was a question of getting the Government out.

He had hardly changed parties, before he had the opportunity of showing what he could do in this line. The Government's principal measure of a very dull programme had been an attempt to tinker with the chronic question of Drink, without trenching on the vested and benevolent interest of those who brewed it. There was the customary attempt to talk it out, followed by the customary closure, and customary row. Only this time Winston was in the forefront of it. He had not been long upon his feet before he was assailed by angry interruptions from his former comrades, and the fighting blood of the Churchills and Jeromes rushed to his head. With his hands on his hips and his head thrust forward, he started—so far as he could be heard above the din—giving them as good as he got, and rather better. The House was a pandemonium, and it was in vain that even the Speaker tried to recall it to a sense of its traditional dignity; so long as Churchill remained on his feet, so long did the interruptions go on. At last, losing the last shreds of his temper, he flung an accusation at Chamberlain of being an accomplice and consenting party to this attack on the liberties of debate, which of course brought Joe to his feet, amid a greater uproar than ever, to retort with the *lie direct*. A mild rebuke from Mr. Speaker did extract from Churchill a sort of qualified withdrawal which was certainly not a retraction.

This is a fair sample of the kind of scene that was becoming more and more frequent in this Parliament, and in which Churchill seldom failed to play a leading part. It was the sort of thing that



would have delighted his father's heart, could he have lived to see it. He had an opponent worthy of his steel in Balfour; for the Premier continued to fight his delaying action with invincible resourcefulness. But though he kept his party from splitting, and up to the last refused to be cornered on the fiscal issue, the effect of the unremitted assault was ruinous to the prestige of his party, and its prospects at the polls. And though the young bloods of the Liberal Opposition formed a group of even more conspicuous talent than the Hughligans had been, none of them, not even Lloyd George himself, displayed a greater ingenuity than Churchill in creating the most damaging popular impression of the Government and its proceedings. His invective, if unmeasured, was aimed with deadly precision. What, for instance, could have been fraught with more injurious suggestion than his taunt at Balfour—"Queens never abdicate"? Queens!

There was no move in the Parliamentary skin game he had elected to play, which he had not at his command. On one occasion he actually succeeded in snatching the draft of a resolution, the terms of which Balfour had been endeavouring to conceal, off the table on which, having spun out time to the verge of midnight, the Premier had laid it, and reading it out to the House just before the stroke of the clock. He was ruthless in applying that form of third degree to his opponents which consisted in the forcing of all-night sittings, in which organized relays of speakers kept up an unrelenting flow of unprofitable loquacity, with no other object than that of wasting as much time, and obstructing as much business as possible, while the unhappy and mostly elderly legislators tried to snatch such sleep as they could in the arm-chairs of the library and smoking-room, until the bell summoned them remorselessly to drag their aching limbs through the lobbies. It was fine sport, for those who had a taste for it, but a visitor from another planet might have been excused for imagining that he had chanced upon the mock Parliament of a mental institution.

There is no doubt that those truly Randolphian tactics, applied continuously throughout the sessions of 1904 and 1905, were triumphantly successful, if not in their immediate object of driving Balfour to the country, at least in ending the long spell of Unionist domination, and, in fact, effecting such a reversal of public sentiment as no Liberal, up to a short time before, would have dared to hope or dream. It is equally certain that they had an irremediable effect in lowering the prestige and authority of Parliament at the time of all others when it was essential to maintain them. For forces were even now beginning to muster by which the very existence of democratic liberty was to be called in question.

In what proportion the blame is to be shared between Balfour and his opponents for so grievous an eventuality it would be vain to discuss. But to anyone to whom history is more than a jazz of headline sensations, the time is one over which it will be a relief to pass as quickly as possible. It can at least be said that the only semblance

of life in the proceedings of the Commons was imparted by the scenes incidental to the continual baiting of a Government that now seemed to have become consciously moribund. In 1905, Balfour's evasiveness had reached something very like open contempt of Parliament, for he actually led his followers out of the House, and allowed motion after motion to be carried not only against Chamberlain's, but what was understood to be his own policy on the fiscal question—it amused the Opposition and did not hurt him. Even the one or two occasions on which he was actually beaten by snatch votes, had no effect in moving him.

It need hardly be said that Churchill took full advantage of the invidious interpretation to which such conduct lent itself, and was tireless in rubbing it in. There was no principle, he said, that the Government were not prepared to abandon; no friend or colleague that they were not prepared to betray; no amount of dirt and filth which they were not prepared to eat, in order to keep in office for a few more weeks and months. By these and similar flowers of oratory he was doing even more to enhance his own reputation than to lower that of Balfour. For he was creating for himself the thing of all others needful for success in the career of a twentieth-century politician; a personality as recognizable and stimulating to the man on the bus, or in the train, as that of Irving at the Lyceum, or Hobbs at the Oval. For every one person who ever troubled to follow Mr. Churchill's arguments about tariffs, there were certainly more than a hundred who chuckled, or exploded, about the latest ebullition of Winston's cheek in the House. The cartoonists lent their services, and already the famous lineaments were beginning to take shape, the forehead exaggerated to a globe, the nose diminished to a button, the squat form, the perpetual cigar. He was established as a star performer in the political melodrama, and those who took him for the villain, and booed loudest, yielded to none in their enjoyment of the performance.

Cranial development is always a difficult thing to carry off with a public, whose instinctive reaction is,

He thinks too much, such men are dangerous.

The cartoonists were therefore well advised in emphasizing this feature by the addition of a hat diminished to the size of a dice box; and the most effective point scored off him in all the many interchanges of this time, was by a Unionist Member who suggested that his fellow feeling for the Chinese coolies on the Rand might be due to the prevalence among them of beri-beri, which was known to take the form of a monstrous swelling of the head. But any publicity was better than none, and the more he was attacked, the more he thrived.

And after all was said and done, this political fighting was something like that in the ancient Hindu epic, when, after sunset, the champions who had stood front to front in mortal combat, would foregather in one another's tents to discuss, in friendliest intimacy,

the events of the day. They were for the most part of the same class, and many of the same set; and as in the interchanges of counsel in court, there was no real malice engendered—or a great deal less than the public imagined.

It was in this very year, 1905, that Churchill, who was in the throes of composing his life of his father, was desirous to consult such relevant documents as might be in the possession of Chamberlain, the man whom he had persisted in assailing with a hostility that must have done more than a little to impair the success of his latest crusade. Notwithstanding this, the old statesman (though few indeed realized that he was just on seventy) invited him not only to see, but also to spend the night at Highbury; and over a bottle of the best wine his cellars could produce, told him that he had been quite right, feeling as he did, to join the Liberals, and that he must expect to have the same sort of mud flung at him as he, Chamberlain, had endured on his change in the reverse direction.

What a game it all was!

## 9.

Even Balfour's tactics could not be prolonged for ever, and it is characteristic of him that when the break did come, it should have been at his own selected moment, and the one that he judged would be most calculated to embarrass the Opposition, by compelling them, by his resignation, to form a Cabinet, and thus to reveal the deep differences of opinion that underlay the appearance of unity. It was a speculation that, as we now know, only just failed to come off, but fail it did, and Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman was able to form a ministerial team not only representing the pick of his party, but one that might plausibly rank as the richest collection of all the talents ever included within the compass of one Cabinet. It was deliberately intended to impart as progressive and energetic a complexion to it as possible, but even so, it seemed to many Liberal enthusiasts as if the Premier had erred on the cautious side in the encouragement he had given to his new blood. Lloyd George, for instance, had been given the comparatively inconspicuous Presidency of the Board of Trade; and as for Winston Churchill, he had to content himself with the mere under-secretaryship of what were still officially lumped together as the Colonies.

However, it was fairly generally understood that Sir Henry, with his Scotch caninness, had a mind to give both these brilliant firebrands a chance of showing what they could do in responsible office, before advancing them to one of the highest posts; and they were both, as it soon proved, capable of focussing the full blaze of the limelight upon their present posts. Churchill, though outside the Cabinet, was peculiarly happily placed; for his chief, Lord Elgin, was not only "in another place", but was a diffident, inconspicuous man, who had been anything but a success as Viceroy of India, and

was far from being up to the high average of his fellow ministers. The result was that Churchill, in the Commons, had almost as free a hand, and tongue, as if he had actually been Colonial Secretary, and differed little from it in the eyes of the average elector, who hardly realized Lord Elgin's existence. But first there was the election to be fought; for the new Premier naturally lost not a moment in taking the verdict of the constituencies. It was a foregone conclusion; for the Unionists themselves had had all the heart taken out of them, and did not even pretend to have the least hope of success. Such defeatism was infectious; and outside the Birmingham area, it was only the safest rural and residential constituencies that a candidate could have stood the remotest chance of holding for Unionism. Churchill's opponent happened to be one of the ablest in the field, a hitherto unknown solicitor called Joynson Hicks, whose genial personality was incongruously combined with almost fanatically Protestant leanings. But had he spoken with the tongues of men and angels, it would have profited him nothing in opposing the Free Trade cause in Manchester. Churchill, though he could have hardly induced the electors to reject him if he had asked them, fought his winning fight with convincing energy. He drew a horrific picture of their great ship canal blocked up by the sand-banks of tariffs, and in their present mood his audience were as much impressed as if the sand had been really there.

It was this election that saw the first appearance of those female storm troopers called suffragettes. It is remarkable that these latter-day furies should, almost from the first, have singled out Mr. Churchill as the object of their most virulent hatred; and a little difficult to explain, since he was by no means unfavourable to the cause they were advocating, and after the attempt of two of them to disturb a Liberal meeting at the Free Trade Hall, at which he had been present, he was reported to have done his best, though without success, to compound for their fines out of his own pocket.

It was his irrepressible combativeness that was probably to blame; for it was characteristic of the suffragette psychosis, that though it gloried in the ruthlessness of its own militancy, it reacted with hysterical fury against any disposition to retaliate on the part of a victim. But Miss Sylvia Pankhurst's account of the first direct encounter with him, certainly suggests that his quick temper had provided material for a grievance, part of the larger grievance that these women undoubtedly had in the determination of successive governments to burke a question that cut so awkwardly across party lines. For it would appear that after one of his meetings, he deliberately persisted in ignoring the perfectly legitimate question she put to him about votes for women. But when one learns in the preceding paragraph that a campaign had been deliberately organized for disturbing his meetings, one suspects that something more may have happened to put his back up than mere questioning. Be that as it may, a furious disturbance did certainly arise, and according to

the lady's own account of the matter, after repeated repetitions of the question had failed to elicit an answer, she was invited by the chairman to put her question from the platform; but having done so, and turned to go, she found herself seized roughly by the arm and pushed into a chair by Churchill, who then proceeded to harangue the audience, accusing her of bringing disgrace on an honoured name, and adding that nothing would induce him to vote for giving women the franchise, and that he was "not going to be henpecked into a question of such importance"—whatever precisely that might mean.\*

This seems so contrary to all one knows of the chivalrous gentleman who is the subject of this biography, that one suspects that his version of the affair might be different, and that if he did lose his temper, it was the result of very great provocation. But the mere fact that Miss Pankhurst, and presumably her friends, were capable of persuading themselves that he had behaved with such indefensible brutality, would explain a good deal of what would otherwise seem unaccountably spiteful, even by suffragette standards, in their subsequent treatment of him.

But these, after all, were mere ripples, that made no perceptible difference to the flowing tide of popular sentiment. Churchill had chosen his constituency with his usual eye for effect. In the whole history of electoral thrills, nothing can surpass that of the January evening in 1906, when the first results began to come in. Then, as now, it was the pride of Manchester to give a lead to the country. Everybody expected something startling, but nothing like what actually happened. And the first indication of it was the announcement that Churchill was in, by what, in those days, was the thumping majority of 1,241. And then, as seat after seat followed in rapid succession, came the even more sensational news that Balfour was out! Manchester had changed from solid Unionist, of the last election, to solid Liberal. And that was only the beginning of the most overwhelming electoral triumph since that of the Whigs on the morrow of the great Reform Bill. A mere rump of 157 Unionists struggled back to Westminster. The more sanguine Liberal organs actually proclaimed that Unionism, as an effective political force, had ceased to exist.

\* *The Suffragette Movement*, by Sylvia Pankhurst, p. 193.

## IV.

### MINISTERIAL APPRENTICESHIP

#### I.

ON THE morrow of this intoxicating triumph, it must have seemed as if the country had been made safe for Liberalism for at least a generation. A vigorous policy of social reform, within the limits of the existing social order, and with Tariff Reform barred, was what the country plainly demanded, and what the new team of ministers seemed fully capable of supplying. Few people yet grasped the significance of the appearance of a new party, over fifty strong, that was not progressive, but revolutionary; nor had reflected on the law of two-party dynamics, in virtue of which a Left wing will always be overborne in the long run by one still further to the left, and a party in the middle partitioned like Poland between its neighbours on either side. Few realized what elements of disintegration lay hid behind the brave façade of a united Liberalism, or that the tumour of the still unsolved Irish problem, though dormant, was as malignant as ever. Still less was it realized to what extent the whole face of Europe was destined to be changed by the now plainly foreshadowed attempt of the Teutonic centre to become another and greater Roman Empire, and the consequent lining up of the Powers to the East and West, supported by England, in the common impulse of self-preservation.

Balfour had no doubt some inkling of this, and Sir Edward Grey, who had taken over from Lord Lansdowne at the Foreign Office, saw clearly the signs of the coming storm, and had a single eye to the navigation of the ship with hardly any thought for differences on board; but in the joyous, triumphant mood of the moment, no ordinary Liberal had a thought for anything but going full speed ahead with the party's domestic programme; and the question that was most to the fore was what showing its young Left-wingers, who embodied its most progressive aspirations, would make now that their energies were harnessed to the solid work of office. Would Winston, for example, find his style hopelessly cramped, or would he succeed in being more Winston than ever in his new elevation?

That question was answered, in a way that must have caused some searchings of heart even among his most fervent well-wishers. It soon became evident that the cares of office had not put the least brake on that boundless self-confidence of his, or bridle on his tongue. He was as irrepressibly brilliant as he had been in opposition, and not perceptibly more discreet. Very early in the session he had a task to perform that needed more delicacy of handling than he had as yet acquired. The violent party agitation that had been worked up over the Chinese coolies, had naturally fastened upon

the person of Lord Milner, who, as the agent of an extreme imperialist policy in South Africa, was naturally, even after his return to England, the target for the bitterest invective among those of the Liberal rank and file who were simple enough to take everything said in the give and take of the political game at its face value. One of these was a certain Mr. Byles, one of those earnest and simple souls who are a greater embarrassment to their own side than to the enemy. This gentleman had been horrified to discover that Milner had once sanctioned the flogging of some coolies; and though the error had been frankly acknowledged and regretted, was not to be turned aside from moving a formal vote of censure, for which, in the exalted mood of the House, nothing could have prevented a majority on a straight vote. It therefore fell to Winston's lot to blunt the force of this, by an amendment that condemned flogging in general terms without mentioning Milner. But unfortunately his own dislike and disapproval of a man whom, since his South African days, he had regarded, not without reason, as an uncompromising warmonger, got the better of him. His attitude to the ex-High Commissioner was rather like that of a head-master, who tells some boy who has been sent up to his study, that in consideration of his high place in the school he will be let off with a severe reprimand. Mrs. Asquith, though the wife of one of the leading Liberal ministers, referred in her diary to Winston's "ungenerous, patronizing and tactless speech", and added that after Milner's own expression of regret it was "calculated to hurt and offend everyone". King Edward, for all that he had taken to Winston hardly less than he had done to his father, was even more severe, describing his conduct as "simply scandalous", and certainly the spectacle of this young man riding the high horse over one of Milner's distinction and record, was only successful in defeating its own object, and provided the House of Lords with a welcome opportunity of inflicting a public and popular snub upon the Commons, by an overwhelming vote of their own confidence in the accused statesman.

It was in connection with this same Chinese coolie business that Churchill let slip an expression that became part of the national idiom, and stuck to his name in a sense anything but complimentary. The cry of Chinese slavery, constantly repeated, had done as much as anything else to arouse the country against the Unionists; but it was observed that once in office, the new Government showed no undue hurry about getting the slaves out of bondage. And when pressed by the Opposition upon this apparent inconsistency, Churchill, speaking for the Colonial Office, blandly admitted that in the Government view the contract, under which they were employed, could not "be classified as slavery in the extreme acceptance of the word without some risk of terminological inexactitude". This has been described in recent biographies as "courageous", and an instance of "verbal adroitness"; but popular opinion at the time adopted "terminological inexactitude" as—what it has in fact re-

mained ever since—a cynical euphemism for a lie, and took the statement for an admission that the principles attributed to George Washington were too rigid altogether for application to the political game, a somewhat startling plea to urge on behalf of a party that more than any other prided itself upon its fidelity to principle. And though it may be courageous, it is certainly hardly adroit to give one's opponents a handle for discrediting any one of one's future statements as another terminological inexactitude. It was a handle only too eagerly grasped in the course of subsequent years.

For it is as well to realize that few characters in public life have succeeded in concentrating upon themselves such active and intense hostility as did Churchill during this phase of his career. His secession to the Liberals was indeed perfectly understood, not only by Chamberlain, but other leading players, as all in the political game; and behind the scenes there was very little resentment. In fact one of Churchill's fastest friendships was with his new opposite number on the Unionist side, F. E. Smith, a young barrister from Birkenhead, whose biting tongue had already made him the terror not only of witnesses, but even of judges in the courts, and who now devoted his talents to scarifying the Government, and was one of the few people capable of giving Churchill as good as he got.

But the general public, which had only its newspapers and other printed matter to go by, knew nothing of amenities behind the scenes, and naturally took the game for the real thing. And to that very large upper and middle-class public, from the county set down to the black-coated clerk clinging to the edge of gentility on a sweated salary, the public that formed the solid core of a Right-wing party, and for whom the music-halls and the most influential part of the press principally catered, Churchill had not only ratted on his party and leader, but had, for reasons of personal ambition, been guilty of something like treason to his class, if not to the Empire. And his deliberately provocative manner inflamed this prejudice to a degree of malignancy difficult to realize by anyone who has not that time in his memory.

The form in which he appeared in cartoons, which was after all that from which the ordinary man shaped his mental image of him, was distorted with libellous ingenuity. And it was in such guise that he became a sort of national Aunt Sally for every shaft of alleged wit, public or intimate, refined or otherwise. If he was known to have indulged in a little climbing, some magazine wag would enquire whether he had discovered a mountain with as much side as his own. Every music-hall song with topical allusions would be pretty sure to include something like the following :

The Radicals discovered that Free Trade would have to go,  
And Mr. Winston Churchill found something he didn't know,  
On the night that the Old Cow died.

The lewd press of the baser sort could not even refrain from taking



advantage of his initials . . . :—such people ought to be sat upon. And there was going the rounds an irreverently prophetic story about his forcing his way into Heaven past an overawed St. Peter, with the announcement that he was Winston Churchill, and finally of One on a Throne rising with an apologetic “Your chair, I think.”

But there was worse than this comparatively genial horseplay; there were the old lies about his escape from Pretoria, dished up with a greater addition of poison than ever—he was more than once able to nail these to the counter by appropriate legal action. But one wonders whether malice could have been carried to a more brazen extreme than that of accusing him, of all people, of cowardice?

Luckily, he was thick-skinned, and shrewd enough to realize that for authors and politicians all publicity, short of that provided by the criminal courts, is grist to the mill, and that it is far better to be maligned than to be ignored. Nor was it all denigration. His reputation among his new associates went up by leaps and bounds; and the greater the fury he aroused in the Unionist ranks, the more the Liberals applauded him, and the more surely he became marked out for promotion.

There were solid grounds for such appreciation. For though in some of his outbursts he still displayed the irresponsibility of a school-boy, he could, if a sufficiently great occasion were presented to him, vie with any elder statesman in weightiness and perspicacity. Such an opportunity came to him in piloting through the Commons what on a long view was by far the most important measure of the Session, and perhaps of the Government's whole term of office, in the practically unconditional grant of a free Constitution to the Transvaal. It was a venture of amazing boldness, and it was one of the few occasions when the Liberal ministers were bold enough to sink opportunist calculations and go all out for their avowed principles. No task could have been more congenial to Churchill. Even in the field, and when, as an avowed Unionist, he had been urging his countrymen to redouble their efforts for victory, he had been in the best sense a pro-Boer. For he had admired the gallant Dutchmen, and had all along wished for a peace that should leave no bitterness, but, as he himself put it, build upon the reconciliation, and not upon the rivalry of races. Now he had the opportunity of making his dream come true. For this settlement might justly be regarded as consummating the peace; the original convention under which the Boers had laid down their arms being more in the nature of an armistice, or preliminary draft.

It is not without good cause that an excellent series of reprints has embodied, in a selection of classic pronouncements on British colonial policy, the speech in which he set forth the terms of this settlement. For the lucid exposition of a great theme, it would be hard to beat; and the tone is throughout of a seriousness that soars far above party controversy, and culminates in a moving appeal to the Opposition to join in making this free Constitution the gift not only of a party, but

of England. There are few today, even among the most loyal Tories, who would not be found to regret that the invitation should have fallen on deaf ears.

Later in the year, Mr. Churchill had to perform a similar office for the Orange Free State; and in this speech he soared to even loftier heights, as he dwelt upon the effects of liberty under British auspices:

"The cause of the poor and the weak all over the world will have been sustained; and everywhere small peoples will get more room to breathe, and everywhere great empires will be encouraged by our example to step forward . . . into the sunshine of a more gentle and a more generous age."

Pathetic optimism!

## 2.

But his post at the Colonial Office was one in which Mr. Churchill's impetuous and explosive disposition was likely to be the source of some danger. For there can hardly be imagined a relationship that called for the exercise of greater tact and self-restraint than that between the Dominions, with their self-conscious and thin-skinned nationalism, and a British Government that had been swept to office on a wave of triumphant Liberalism, and had behind it all the anti-imperialist sentiment in the country. For what the Colonies and Dominions understood by freedom was the right to be masters in their own houses, which might include, quite literally, that of walloping their own niggers; whereas to earnest Liberals at home, anything savouring of tyranny under the British flag was viewed with an honest abhorrence that might not rest satisfied with the attitude of Gallio.

Under these circumstances Mr. Churchill's faculty, that he had acquired from Macaulay, of lucid and telling statement, was a source of strength that perhaps resembled a little too much that of a young bull turned loose in a china shop. There was, for instance, a delicate situation created by native unrest in Natal, and the drastic measures of repression that the local Government thought fit to adopt; and there could have been no more admirable statement of the Colonial Office's right to put a brake on these activities, than to point out, as Churchill did, that a colony is not entitled to say "Hands off! no dictation in our internal affairs"; and the next day to telegraph for the protection of a brigade of British infantry. But when one reflects that this was precisely the case of George III's ministers against the American colonists, it is evident that to hold this sort of language is playing with fire. And in point of fact sentiment in Natal became dangerously inflamed, the ministry actually resigning at one time, and doubts being freely expressed about the imperial connection, that had a strange sound among the most intensely pro-British of South African peoples. Luckily the Union of South Africa, which was the

direct sequel of the Government's concession of freedom to the Boers, removed any temptation from the Colonial Office of burning its fingers in Natal.

But the Imperial Conference, that met in London in the following year, 1907, provided the Under-Secretary with the incentive for a blazing indiscretion that shows how far he was, as yet, from finding a coolness of judgment commensurate with his brilliance. The task of eliminating friction from the discussions was bound to be exacting, since the Dominions were all united in advocating a system of Imperial Preference that the Home Government was, of course, pledged to the hilt to reject. And so far as the proceedings of the Conference itself were concerned, Mr. Churchill rose to the occasion in a manner that was both statesmanlike and conciliatory, and if he had left the matter there, he would only have added to the golden opinions that he had earned in the previous year. But unfortunately some of the visiting Premiers, who themselves were perhaps not models of tactful restraint, had expressed themselves in public on the advantages of Preference, in a manner scarcely calculated to enhance their popularity in Liberal circles. This undoubted indiscretion seems to have infuriated Churchill to such an extent, that the mantle of statesmanship fell from his shoulders, and he became, for the moment, a completely reckless party stump orator. Speaking at Edinburgh, he launched out into just such a rasping attack on the Premiers as he might have made on Balfour or F. E. Smith. They were guests, he reminded them, of the Government, and the laws of hospitality, which were the most ancient and sacred, imposed obligations not only on the hosts but on the guests. As for Preference, he dropped all pretence of conciliation, and announced in one of the most famous of his hitting phrases, that the Government had banged the door on it—yes, banged it, barred it, and bolted it. It was a good stout door of British oak, and the largest Liberal, Labour and Radical majority ever seen had their backs firmly against it. After this it seems almost unnecessary to have rubbed it in still further, by announcing that the Government would not give a farthing preference on a single peppercorn.

The fact that this public and insulting defiance did not succeed in inflicting lasting damage on the relations between the Mother-Country and the Dominions, was perhaps because the Premiers, and those they represented, were too sensible to make heavy weather of the indiscretions of a ministerial understrapper; and perhaps partly due to the faculty that Winston, like his father, seems to have possessed, of being able to get away with the most outrageous provocations. But even as late as 1921, memories were long enough to cause a momentary fluttering of the Dominion dovescotes in his appointment to the Colonial Office.\*

It is pleasant to turn from this to a novel experiment that Mr. Churchill made in the winter of 1907-8, when he succeeded in com-

\* *British Colonial Policy of the Twentieth Century*, by F. E. Egerton, p. 135.

bining duty, pleasure, and profit, by making a personal survey of Britain's latest colonial acquisitions in the heart of Africa, on a journey which started from Mombasa, the port of British East Africa, and took him by rail through that colony to the great Victoria Nyanza, whence he followed the course of the Nile, all the way through Uganda, the Sudan, and Egypt, down to the Delta and the sea. Nothing could have been more happily thought of than for the Colonial Under-Secretary to study on the spot those intricate and, at home, dimly realized problems, created by the process of imperial expansion; and to hob-nob with as many people on the spot as he could meet, not only the whites, whom he found as politically minded and argumentative as himself, but with the native chiefs, with whose point of view he was equally sympathetic.

To some, it might have seemed of more questionable import that he should have reverted to his old craft of journalism, and recorded his adventures in a series of articles, illustrated by copious photographs, in *The Strand Magazine*. But if ever there was excuse for the journalistic activities of a King's Minister, it was surely here, since it was hardly possible for him, on tour, to be about his departmental business, and there could be no better way of educating the people at home in their imperial responsibilities. The result, embodied in book form, makes extremely attractive reading, even today, and as travel books go, dates remarkably little.

It was only to be expected that a good part of the tour, and the book, should have been occupied by that slaughter of the larger fauna of the country, without which no English gentleman's irruption into the wilds would be endurable. It was a source of peculiar satisfaction to have diminished by one the stock of a particularly rare species of rhinoceros. But it is characteristic of Mr. Churchill's innate chivalry, that even when facing the charge of a wounded victim, he should have found time, so he tells us, to reflect that it was he and his friends who had forced the conflict by an unprovoked assault on a peaceful herbivore, and that if there was such a thing as right and wrong between man and beast, right was plainly on the beast's side. It is something to be capable of thinking this, even without acting upon it.

In due course, leaving the magnificent scenery of the great lakes, they steamed for days through the vast, monotonous, papyrus swamps of the White Nile, past the almost forgotten Fashoda, that had nearly been the occasion of a European War, and so on to rejoin civilization at Khartoum, which, in less than ten years from Churchill's last entry, had become a stately city. And here it was that what had hitherto been a voyage of pure pleasure was clouded with tragedy, for his valet, like himself an old soldier, was carried off in a few hours by cholera. So once again, his coming to Khartoum was marked by the ceremonial of a military funeral.

His apprenticeship in a junior office was now drawing to an end. Campbell Bannerman, who, in spite of the fact that nobody had ever previously regarded him as much more than a political stop-gap, had acquitted himself unexpectedly well in supreme office, was a sick, and in fact a dying man. In April, 1908, he was forced to retire, and was succeeded by his Chancellor of the Exchequer, Asquith—a much more incisive personality, but a lawyer politician with an almost eighteenth-century aversion from any sort of enthusiasm, who was more in his element pleading a brief than fighting a crusade. Under his auspices, the distinctively Liberal element in official Liberalism tended towards vanishing point, and such acts of pure faith as the grant of the Transvaal Constitution became unthinkable. The Government was in fact pursuing at home a policy almost indistinguishable from what Lord Randolph had understood by Tory democracy, one of an ostensibly progressive opportunism, designed to get the maximum of popular support, and defeat the other side by any means or measures available. It need hardly be said that this was ideally suited to the genius of Winston Churchill in what might still be described as the Randolphian phase of his career.

The new Premier's first move was to make a partial reconstruction of his Cabinet, in the course of which Winston's chief at the Colonial Office was quietly shelved, and he himself moved up to Cabinet rank as President of the Board of Trade. It was high time, for, as Asquith told the King, he had behaved very well when twice passed over previously in favour of "Lulu" Harcourt and McKenna, both of whom had had inferior claims.\* It is perhaps hardly the post one would have thought best suited for his essentially military turn of mind; but it would seem that he might actually have had the Admiralty if he had chosen; and his self-confidence and energy were fully equal to imposing his own stamp upon an office that Lloyd George had, after all, made the stepping stone to the Exchequer.

But first, according to a law that had never been repealed, and seemed designed for no other purpose than that of making it as difficult as possible to carry on the King's government efficiently, he had to go through all the expense and trouble of fighting a by-election in his constituency—not to speak of any other constituency he might have to fight if he could not win that. Now North-West Manchester was no longer the safe Liberal proposition it had been early in 1908. For the mood of triumphant optimism that had followed the election had already been badly deflated. Things had not gone at all according to the Government programme. Instead of being overwhelmed by their defeat, the Unionist control had decided on a strategy of extraordinary boldness, by employing the House of Lords, which for all practical purposes could be counted as part of

\* *Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith*, by J. A. Spender and Cyril Asquith, Vol. 1, p. 195.

the party machine, to hamstringing the Government activities. This they did by letting through all legislation that aimed at genuine social reform, or in which the masses imagined their interests to be involved, but throwing out such measures as were designed for purely party purposes, and that commanded no general support in the country. The Peers had played their cards—or rather, been played themselves—with such skill, that the Government had suffered the humiliation of seeing its most important measures wrecked, without daring to grasp the nettle and go to the country about it, and there is little doubt that it was only the unconquerable aversion of the industrial North from any tampering with Free Trade, that prevented a decisive swing back of public opinion to the Unionist allegiance.

North-West Manchester therefore no longer offered the prospect of a walk over for Churchill, more especially since, at a by-election, the voters could express their opinion about the Government without endangering Free Trade. And to add to his difficulties, the suffragettes, now greatly strengthened in numbers and resources, were determined to do their damndest for the discomfiture of their pet aversion. The redoubtable Miss Christabel Pankhurst fixed her headquarters in the constituency, and it was in vain that Churchill endeavoured to conciliate her and her myrmidons by declaring his adhesion to their cause and pledging himself to be their friend in the Cabinet—these termagants were not to be appeased unless he could pledge them not only his own surrender, but that of Asquith and the whole Cabinet, and when he failed to comply with this modest request, set upon him with greater fury than ever.

Of more ominous import was a difficulty that arose in the threatened withdrawal of the Irish vote, which was substantial in this Manchester constituency, and was disposed of by the Nationalist party leaders as a pawn in their own game for Home Rule, a question that the Liberals, so long as they retained a majority big enough to make them independent, were content to postpone till the Greek calends. But now that an independent majority could no longer be hoped for at any future election, it was becoming feasible for the Irish to make their support dependent on the acceptance of their conditions, and it was therefore of momentous significance that the new Premier should have been induced to buy their vote by a promise to deal actively with Home Rule after a general election.

It was an enormous blackmail to pay for no reward, for Manchester cast out Churchill as it had cast out Balfour two years previously, and it was an equally resounding defeat for his party. Of course there could be no question of parting with him, and a new seat was soon found in the overwhelmingly Radical Scottish constituency of Dundee. About this second election there was nothing remarkable, except the fact that all this irrelevant bother should have been incidental to a simple administrative change over, and perhaps also the novel method adopted by one of the suffragettes of

demonstrating her own, and other women's, vote-worthiness, by going about from meeting to meeting with a muffin bell, to drown the proceedings. The expected majority was, of course, registered.

At the age of 33 Churchill had thus attained the dignity and scope of Cabinet rank, after a career that, ever since his joining the army, thirteen years before, had been one of practically unbroken success. And nobody, now, imagined this to be any more than a beginning—he himself least of all. It can only have seemed to him, as it did to others, a question of time before he rose from thus high to the highest of all—a time to be curtailed by all means available. He was a supremely confident man in a hurry—and that represents a somewhat dangerous state of mind.

He lost little time in making his weight felt in the Cabinet, at least, if we may trust the highly credible accounts of his insistence on priority for any legislation that he might see fit to promote in the sphere of his own department. For it was his cue to exhibit himself in a new capacity, that of a practical, social reformer. On the very eve of his appointment, he had defined his position on this subject in a striking article he had contributed to *The Nation*, and in which he had maintained that its historic advocacy of freedom was no longer enough for the Liberal Party, but that it must add to it that of social betterment, concentrating its efforts on securing a minimum standard of life for every member of the community, a task in which there need be no distinction of aim between Liberals, Radicals, and Labour men. What this amounted to in practice was a number of useful, but by no means sensational, measures for speeding the working, or eliminating some of the more scandalous abuses, of the existing system. Thus the free play of the employment market was enhanced by a nation-wide system of labour exchanges; in some of the more scandalously sweated industries, trade boards were set up with power to fix a minimum wage; the hard life of miners was somewhat eased by a bill restricting their hours of work to no more than eight at a stretch.

Such achievement can hardly be described as brilliant, but it is evidence of a capacity without which brilliance itself would be worse than vain, and in which Mr. Churchill's best wishers might have feared him to be lacking; the power, that is to say, of sheer, concentrated industry, that tackles the toughest and solidest job, not only in conception, but in detail. Churchill, it must never be forgotten, was a man of his hands, one who had a natural instinct for making and shaping things. And during these two years of his at the Board of Trade, he showed that, though an amateur, he was fully capable of adapting himself to the most exacting requirements of the London School of Economics and the Fabian Society in the practice of sociological reconstruction.

This year, 1908, is a landmark in his career in another sense, for in September he was married to Miss Clementine Hozier, almost as notable a beauty of the Edwardian period as her still radiant

mother-in-law had been of the early 'seventies. It was an immensely popular event; not only St. Margaret's Church, but the greater part of Victoria Street, being crowded by well-wishers of the famous young minister—for on such an occasion all political hostility was suspended. Lord Hugh was the best man, and it was observed that even the bridegroom, as well as the bride, was looking a little pale.

On the marriage itself the sufficient and appropriate comment is contained in the last sentence of his autobiography, "I married and lived happily ever afterwards." Not even the most imaginative and confidential of the gossip that assails all public men, has ever dared to insinuate that this one of his statements is anything but a terminological exactitude.

Indeed, if the modern fashion in biography should persist, one does not envy the unhappy practitioner who at some future date is turned on to Churchill the Man, with instructions to get as great a kick as possible out of this side of his life. For it would appear to have been throughout almost aggressively normal—just as straightforward and happy a union as that of the Gladstones or the Disraelis, of the Brownings or of Victoria and Albert. Mrs. Churchill, though a conspicuously able hostess and organizer, has consistently followed the great tradition of wives of English Prime Ministers—hardly ever broken, or if ever, not with the most encouraging results—of seeking no career apart from that of her husband, and confining herself entirely to the part of "brilliant second".

But what a decisive, and historic, part that may be, by reason of its very self-effacement, only he can, and perhaps some day will, reveal!

#### 4.

Even during those amazing three weeks, when the whole country was seething with excitement about the Unionist *débâcle*, and the prospects of a new social Utopia according to the rival prescription, the ordinary man little dreamed that at any moment the whole prospect might easily have been changed, and the country fighting for its very existence against the greatest peril that had ever threatened it. One man, however, who did realize it, was the new Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, who had taken over from his Unionist predecessor, Lord Lansdowne, and was carrying on his policy without the least breach of continuity. But the peaceful understanding with France, that had been the mainspring of that policy, was already, under German pressure amounting to the threat of imminent war, beginning to take the form of a potential alliance; and Germany itself, by insistent and open menace, had created a situation in which the whole honour and interest of the two partners were committed to keeping that alliance in being, and adding to it that of Russia. And once that alignment of armed forces was complete, what else could be looked for but a series of crises and challenges, culminating in one that was *not* to be settled peacefully?



That was the situation as it appeared to Grey, and the very few people in the know, at a time when public attention was focused upon the Government's vain endeavours to provide legislative sops for its Non-conformist, Irish, and teetotal supporters, and on the temporarily successful endeavours of the Lords to stultify the Government. And yet so grave was the view of the ultra-pacifist and anti-militarist Premier, Campbell Bannerman, that he had even sanctioned the momentous step of allowing staff talks to be initiated with France—one from which, whatever formal reservations he might choose to make, it was practically impossible that there could be any drawing back. Once the staffs have begun to talk, it becomes rather more than likely that the conversation will be taken up in due course by the cannon. For that, as everybody knows, is what staff talks are for.

Now there was probably one consideration that had weighed more than any other with the Kaiser and his advisers in inducing them to shrink from the supreme test. On land the strength of the German army, with the support it might expect from its partners in the Triple Alliance, was overwhelming. But on sea, the supremacy of British power was unchallengeable; and it was a fact with which the Kaiser was particularly impressed, since the British navy exercised a sort of obsessive fascination over him. It might therefore be regarded as the sign of the final determination to put everything to the touch, at Germany's chosen moment, that to her vast preparations on land she should add an attempt to build up a fleet capable of wresting the command of the sea from what her propagandists openly proclaimed to be the Carthage to her Rome.

And not only was it becoming plain to anyone not wilfully blind that this was exactly what her chiefs intended to do, but, as ill luck would have it, she was starting the attempt under extraordinarily propitious circumstances. For an advance was being made in the science of naval construction hardly less momentous than that from the wooden ship to the ironclad, and one that gave Germany the opportunity of putting the overwhelming supremacy, that Britain had already acquired, out of date, and of starting the competition all over again in the only type of warship likely to count in a fleet action of the future, the all-big-gun Dreadnought. Thanks to the vision and energy of the First Sea Lord, Sir John Fisher, England had obtained a certain lead, even in this race, by rushing through the construction of the original *Dreadnought*; but his great rival Admiral von Tirpitz, who had practically the whole resources of the State to draw upon, was quick off the mark with his answering programme, and it was becoming only too obvious that he was capable of making it what Wellington would have called a damned near run thing.

Here was what had hardly been dreamed of since Trafalgar; a deliberate and hopeful challenge to that control of her sea routes which was all that stood between England and final catastrophe. It

was thus a matter of life or death to her, at all costs, to maintain her lead in the vital elements of sea power. She had the means, if she only had the will, to do so; nor could there be any doubt of her having the will, once let her sluggish imagination be switched over to the urgency of the menace. But could it—in time? That was the question on which all depended.

It was a peculiarly unfortunate circumstance that her new Government had come into power, pledged to a policy not of increasing armaments, but of drastically curtailing them; and that a majority of its supporters in the House were inspired by a single-minded determination not to be diverted from this end by any consideration whatever. And thus it became a point of honour for good Liberals and pacifists to convert themselves into an unintentional but very effective fifth column for Prussian militarism, by strenuously whitewashing its motives and belittling its menace, in order that nothing might be permitted to interfere with the programme, to which they were pledged, of disarmament in the face of the enemy.

Those few ministers who had begun to have some inkling of how things really stood, were thus in a terribly difficult situation. To break it to the mass of their supporters that they were living in a fool's paradise, and that with the enemy at the gates it was a question not of disarming, but of arming up to him, would have been political suicide. The average Liberal was firmly convinced that rumours of war, and the preparation for war, were part of the Tory propaganda—which indeed they were, in the sense that their opponents, with as little regard for the facts as their own, exploited the armament cry as a means of rousing public sentiment against the Liberals. Not for the first time in English history—for a very similar situation had obtained when a Tory majority in the Commons had attempted to disband all but a fraction of the army on the eve of Louis XIV's supreme bid for European supremacy—the Government found it necessary to resort to finesse. Haldane, at the War Office, succeeded in re-organizing the army, for co-operation with the French, on very much the lines of the despised Brodrick scheme, and in disguising this, by skillful manipulation of figures, as a measure of actual reduction.

But the crux of the problem was presented by the navy. Here matters had been allowed to slide to danger point—and beyond. The Balfour Government had planned to fix the new construction programme at an annual figure of four battleships, which, it was calculated, would turn out most economical in the long run, since it is only when the leader begins to flag in a race that it becomes a hopeful proposition to challenge him. But the Liberal Government had other views of the German mentality, which might be touched and appeased by an ostentatious slacking of pace into following suit, and leaving the lead unchallenged. Accordingly—on lines that Churchill himself had suggested two years before—a battleship was cut out of the programme in 1906, another in 1907, and no less than

two in 1908, reducing the total by a third. The Germans did indeed show their grateful appreciation by increasing their own programme from two to three, and then from three to four, and this at a time when the *Dreadnought* was putting all the old battleships out of date! "No one", as Churchill himself has written, "could run his eyes down the series of figures of British and German construction during the first three years of the Liberal administration, without feeling in the presence of a dangerous, if not a malignant, design." If that statement is to be taken literally, it would seem that some one managed to disguise his feeling singularly well.

The position in 1908 was thus one of deadly peril, the more so because to the ordinary civilian mind there was nothing to indicate it. The possibility of losing the war, and with the war, everything, by a sort of naval fool's mate in the opening moves, was only to be appreciated by one with some inside knowledge, and the gift of interpreting it in terms of strategy. Of all the ministers, it might have seemed as if Churchill were the one most answering to this description. In the Cabinet he was a soldier among civilians, and had written with authority on military matters. He had also had first-hand experience of the German army; for in 1906 he had been the Kaiser's guest at its manoeuvres in Silesia, and had seen something of its impressive strength. And he had long been alive, as his speech on the Brodrick reforms had shown, to the need for maintaining British sea supremacy. He, of all people, might have been expected to warn his colleagues that the German war on England had virtually begun, and that this intensive Dreadnought building was the first and—unless instantly countered—might be the final blow.

But there were other strands in his composition, and he could never forget that his father had staked and lost all in the attempt to reduce expenditure on the services. He himself was enthusiastically absorbed in that task of ameliorating social conditions, on which his father's heart had been set, and for which his own office now gave him scope. And his ally, Lloyd George, at the Exchequer, was engaged in just the same fight as Lord Randolph against the insatiable demands of the service departments. All of which may go some way towards explaining a certain unwillingness to be convinced of so inopportune a necessity as that of diverting millions of necessary pounds from the war against poverty, to the multiplication of vast, floating, gun-platforms, useless for any purpose but that of destruction. And we must remember that to his many brilliant qualities, coolness of judgment was still conspicuously lacking. And thus we find him only too apt to put the telescope to the shut eye of his mind, before committing himself to combative action.

However we explain it, there can be no doubt of his attitude, which was one of uncompromising refusal to admit the existence of a German menace, or of the need to spend a single additional penny in providing against it. Conscious of the nervousness that was beginning to manifest itself in the country, he delivered a passionate ora-

tion in August at Swansea, in which he assured his audience of miners that the alarmists had no ground whatever for their panic or fear. England and Germany, he said, had nothing to fight about, no prize to fight for, and no place to fight in.

"How many people", he asked, "are there in Germany who really want to make a murderous attack on this country? I do not suppose in the whole of that great population of 50 or 60 millions of inhabitants there are 10,000 persons who would seriously contemplate such a hellish and wicked crime."

And considerably more, to the same effect of suggesting that German intentions being guaranteed honourable, German Dreadnoughts could be regarded as negligible.

The situation was curiously parallel to one that was to develop more than a quarter of a century later, and with which Winston Churchill was also to be much concerned—when Field Marshal Goering was beginning to build up the great German air force with feverish expedition, and when the National Government in England was endeavouring to allay public anxiety by soothing assurances that it had the situation in hand, and that there was no question of England allowing herself to be outbuilt. Only in the earlier period there was this significant difference; the British public had had the tradition of sea power implanted by the experience of many generations, and was extraordinarily sensitive to the least suggestion of its being challenged; whereas even in the 'thirties, air power was something new and strange, about which it was less quick to take alarm.

It was therefore a harder task for Churchill and Lloyd George, in 1908, to induce a state of complacency about Dreadnoughts, than it was to be for Mr. Baldwin about air parity. All through that year public apprehension was steadily mounting, and was being worked up, for reasons not wholly disinterested, by the Opposition and stunt press. It was only confirmed by blundering and tactless efforts of the Kaiser himself, in a private letter to Lord Tweedmouth at the Admiralty, and a public interview in *The Daily Telegraph*, to suggest that there was no need whatever either to fear, or arm against, Germany.

The crisis came early in the following year, when the naval estimates came up for discussion in the Cabinet. Tweedmouth, who had gone off his head shortly after receiving the imperial communication, had been replaced at the Admiralty by Mr. Reginald McKenna, a modest man, who had served a brief term at the Education Office with no very conspicuous success, and though promoted to Cabinet rank before Churchill, had nothing like his reputation in the country. But he had a shrewd head for figures, and had studied those submitted to him by his sea lords, who were now fully alive to the seriousness of the situation; and these figures had convinced him that only by a heroic effort to make up for shipbuilding arrears, would it be possible to insure even the barest margin of superiority three or four years ahead, in the not improbable event of the Ger-

mans grasping the opportunity presented to them, and exploiting it with the maximum possible speed and secrecy. And it is to his eternal credit that he should have determined to take his political life in his hands, and to make a lonely stand in the Cabinet upon the demands of his naval advisers, even to the point of his own resignation. It might well have seemed a hopeless undertaking, since not only would this put into reverse the declared and cherished Liberal policy of disarmament, but he was exposing himself to the uncompromising hostility of the two most dynamic of his colleagues. For not only had Churchill and Lloyd George banged, barred, and bolted the door of their own minds upon any facts or arguments tending to the increase of naval expenditure, but the chance of suppressing McKenna exactly suited their book, since, as one of the moderate wing of the Cabinet, his influence had been thrown into the scale against the daring strategy by which they proposed to turn the tables on the Lords, by the mock revolutionary Budget that Lloyd George was preparing. And what chance could this comparatively obscure minister, who was more or less on probation in his present office, hope to have against this redoubtable partnership, swollen by the adhesion of another young thruster in the Cabinet, "Lulu" Harcourt, and the veteran pacifist, John Morley.

The struggle began early in the year, when the First Lord presented to the Cabinet, with a view to the forthcoming naval estimates, the unanimous requirements of his Board in the way of new construction. These, far from erring in the direction of panic, provided for what, in view of the German threat, was not only the lowest conceivable minimum compatible with patriotic sanity, but what some people with knowledge of the facts would have pronounced lower than the lowest; for it did not even provide for making good the arrears of the Conservative programme, framed under so much less arduous circumstances—since instead of eight, it only provided for six new Dreadnought keels in the coming financial year. But these six were two too many for the Churchill-Lloyd George combination, and they flung themselves into the fight for a bare four with as much ardour as if Tirpitz himself had been directing them.

Lloyd George happened at this moment to be going through an ardently pro-German phase, since he had in the previous year made a trip to Germany to study methods of state socialism, and in particular, of compulsory insurance, and he had been received with the most flattering cordiality, which he had reciprocated, in spite of his leadership of the anti-beer crusade, in draughts of foaming lager. As for Churchill, he had studied the figures presented by the Sea Lords, and had had little difficulty in convincing himself that the admirals were talking through their hats, and frightening themselves with imaginary dangers, and moreover that the chance of their united and expert opinion being after all correct, and his own mistaken, was one that he, and the country, could safely afford to neg-

lect. He therefore proceeded to enlighten his constituents at Dundee, and through them, the country at large, on the precise nature of the fallacies by which these simple sailors were bemused, in a series of four propositions, the effect of which was to show that numbers of ships were no guide to naval strength; that there could be no possibility of Germany stealing a march by secretly accelerating her construction programme; and, most of all, that there could be no profound antagonism between Germany (which was notoriously seething with it, and had recently precipitated another first-class European crisis) and England. In the comparison between the earlier Churchill and the later Baldwin, it must be admitted that Baldwin never succeeded in putting the case for complacency with anything approaching this authoritative lucidity.

In the animated discussions that took place in the Cabinet, McKenna soon discovered that he was practically without support for his demand, and that the opposition to it, which was led, with all his wonted energy, by Churchill, was too strong for him. After what was understood to be the final discussion, the Cabinet, having decided to whittle down the proposed six to four, broke up, leaving McKenna alone doing up his papers, and reflecting on the terms of his resignation. But his dejection had not passed unobserved by Sir Edward Grey, who quickly returned, and on learning the cause of it, enquired,

"Do you really mean that? Are you so certain that you are right?"

Having received the necessary assurance, Grey simply said,

"If you go, I shall go too. I shall see Asquith." \*

In an instant, the tables were turned. Grey occupied a peculiar position in the Government. He was regarded by all parties alike as a man above party on matters of national policy, and his resignation, accompanied by that of the First Lord and the whole Board of Admiralty, would have created such a panic throughout the whole length and breadth of the country, as no government could have hoped to survive. There was nothing for it but for Asquith to call another meeting of the Cabinet, in order to get the previous decision reversed.

It was checkmate for the Churchill-Lloyd George combination, or, as Asquith himself put it, "a complete *débâcle* for them and their ideas, and the two . . . cannot help reflecting how they would have looked this moment if they had resigned, with (as Winston predicted) 90 per cent. of the Liberal Party behind them". † But it was characteristic of the Premier that his subtle intelligence should have hit upon a way of doing what had to be done, while saving the face of everybody concerned. He did not openly abandon the decision for the four Dreadnoughts, but he proposed to add to these not two, but four others, in the course of the financial year, if, and when, events should render their laying down necessary. And that was the form

\* *Grey of Fallodon*, by G. M. Trevelyan, p. 213.

† *Ib.*

in which the construction programme was presented by McKenna to the House.

It was an extremely clever solution, but one that happened to be a little too clever. For it had left out of account the effect on the British public, already worked up to a state of acute nervous tension about the reports of disagreement in the Cabinet, and whose worst suspicions seemed to be confirmed. For it appeared quite obvious that the four extra Dreadnoughts were what the experts at the Admiralty had actually judged to be necessary for the safety of the country, but that the Little Navyites in the Cabinet were determined to prevent their construction by a piece of transparent chicanery, and that if they succeeded the country might wake up some fine morning—say in 1912—and find itself naked to all the horrors of invasion. The Opposition, backed by the halfpenny press, were quick to seize the opportunity, and one of the Unionist ex-ministers, George Wyndham, coined what may perhaps rank as about the most effective slogan on record in

“We want eight, and we won’t wait.”

All the materials were present for working up a first-class panic, and the effect abroad of the advertisement of German hostility and British unpreparedness was the last thing any of its promoters were prepared to take into account, especially as they were sincerely convinced that the country actually was in the peril they described.

The situation had now got utterly out of ministerial control. The Cabinet might propose what it pleased, but the nation for once had made up its own mind, and would brook no denial. John Bull, if we may use that convenient symbol, had become invincibly persuaded of two things; first that his fleet was in danger, and next that the politicians were not playing straight with him—exactly the conclusion he had formed about Balfour not so long before, with such disastrous consequences to him and his party. He wanted his eight Dreadnoughts, the whole eight, and nothing but eight, without any sort of humbug or qualification, and every day that the Government delayed to toe the line inflamed his suspicions, and increased the danger of a landslide. There was nothing for it but to bow to the inevitable and give him his way as soon as it could be done with dignity. It was in July that the extra four ceased to be conditional. Thus, as Churchill himself puts it, the Admiralty had demanded six; the economists had offered four; and they had finally compromised on eight. The net result of his and Lloyd George’s efforts to dock the navy of two battleships, had been to increase it by precisely that amount.

Perhaps Asquith, who, within the limits of practical politics, was a sincere patriot, and at heart more of an imperialist than a Liberal, was not sorry to find himself thus violently precipitated through the door that he had incautiously set ajar.

As for Churchill, never was the hand of that Providence which, as

he himself believes, has him in its care, more manifest than in his defeat. It is perhaps only human that he should score for himself the debating point that the worst fears of the Admiralty were not realized, nor did Tirpitz attempt to rush through his programme ahead of schedule. Of course he didn't, when he perceived that the game was up. And if, on the Ides of March, Julius Cæsar had been advised by his wife, and stopped at home, it would have been equally open for Brutus to have pleaded that, as it turned out, the peaceful routine of the Senate was undisturbed that morning by the drawing of a single dagger.

But this ingenuous sophism in no way detracts from the magnanimity of Mr. Churchill's confession that "we were absolutely wrong in relation to the deep tides of destiny", or of the noble tribute he pays to McKenna, "for the resolute and courageous way in which he fought his case and withstood his party . . . little did he think that the ships for which he contended so stoutly would eventually, when they arrived, be welcomed with open arms by me".

But if that courage had failed, or if Grey had not been there to give that resolution the necessary backing, and the two-handed engine of German naval and military power had stood ready, some time in 1912, to strike once and strike no more—what verdict would history have passed on Lloyd George and Winston Churchill? A different one, no doubt, from any that seems thinkable today. But not necessarily more reliable.

It is idle to speculate. For the proof of greatness is not in freedom from error, but in the capacity to learn from it.

## 5.

This Dreadnought episode, that looms so large in our present perspective, probably seemed of minor importance to Churchill at the time, compared with the great political struggle that was rising to a climax at home, and in which if not the most, he was certainly the second most conspicuous protagonist. It must be remembered that by the beginning of 1909, the fortunes of the Liberal Party had fallen from the towering height of three years previously to so low a level, that it might have seemed as plainly drifting to disaster as Balfour's Government during its last two years of office. The strategy of the Opposition had been brilliantly successful, and had culminated in the contemptuous rejection by the Lords of an intensely unpopular Licensing Bill, that had been the leading measure of the 1908 Session; and the public humiliation and surrender of the Dreadnought crisis might have been expected to be the last nail in the Government's coffin. The one hope on which the Liberals had to rely was the fact that Tariff Reform hung like a millstone about their enemy's neck, and it would have seemed that if only its promoters could have been induced to let this issue be shelved for a more convenient season, a full swing back of the pendulum was assured. The



Unionists in fact had the game in their hands, and had only to play their cards correctly.

But it is just when a situation appears to be almost irrecoverable, that the opportunity may present itself for retrieving it by some daring stroke. This was not to be expected from Asquith, who, for all his ability, was conspicuously lacking in initiative. But it was just the chance for such a combination as that of Lloyd George and Churchill. And they had a plan of extraordinary daring and simplicity, of which the authorship may be credited in the first place to Lloyd George, but in whose shaping Churchill's hand may be plainly seen, and which was thoroughly in harmony with his genius.

Let us try to see the problem as it must have presented itself to them at the time. When your opponent has the game in his hands, it is impossible to devise any strategic scheme that *ought* not to be defeated. Your only chance is to study your opponent's mind, in order to discover some line of habitual stupidity, and then, having disposed matters so as to make this the line of maximum temptation, stake everything on the chance of his following it, and playing into your hands.

Now it was evident that what had given the Unionist leaders their winning advantage hitherto, had been their control of the Lords and the skill they had displayed in exploiting it. It was equally evident that they were playing a very dangerous game, one that almost amounted to a Right-wing revolution, and in which one single mistake might be fatal. Hitherto that mistake had not been made. The Lords would, in fact, have plausibly claimed to have demonstrated how a Second Chamber could be employed to keep a majority in the Commons functioning democratically, and head it off every time it forsook the paths of statesmanship for those of faction. That it only did this for one party need not affect the immediate issue. It did not follow they were wrong now, because they had failed to do right in the past.

But what if the House of Lords could be induced to put itself by its own action hopelessly and outrageously in the wrong; if it could be induced no longer to stand forth as the bulwark of democracy against faction, but as a mob of selfish plutocrats, who, rather than contribute a moiety of their enormous wealth to finance those very defence measures, for which they had clamoured, would be prepared to wreck the Constitution whose special championship they had assumed? Such a genius for self-immolation might have seemed beyond the prospect of belief in what ought to have been the intellectual pick of the community. But the attorney from Wales and the ex-Hussar knew the men with whom they were dealing, and to what extent the new model of public-school education had been successful in standardizing behaviour by eliminating intellect. And their plan had the simplicity that is characteristic of all great strategic conceptions.

They knew that a constitutional tradition, older than that which

barred the use of the royal veto, barred that of the Peers on the annual Budget. Their problem, then, was to produce a Budget so cunningly calculated to infuriate and inconvenience these owners of great estates, as to cause them, instead of conforming to the carefully-thought-out strategy of the party staff, to throw out the Budget with no more thought of the consequences than a herd of charging buffalo. Then the losing position would be turned, as by miracle, into a winning one, and all that would remain would be to drive home the advantage by proclaiming a holy war of poor against rich, and democracy against privilege. Even the Dreadnought fiasco could be turned to advantage, by amending the slogan to "We want eight, and we won't pay." It was a plan that would have rejoiced the heart of Randolph Churchill, and if it was not exactly playing the game according to the old gentlemanly standards, it might fairly be urged that the Peers had started converting it into a skin game.

In the famous contest that followed, it was Lloyd George who played the dominating role, for it was he who introduced the Budget and who delivered that masterpiece of emotional oratory at Limehouse, in which, to the dismay of the elder statesmen of his own party, he unfurled the red flag of class war. Churchill's part might be described as that of a brilliant second. When a league was formed for the promotion of the Budget he became its president, and he delivered a series of fighting speeches, in the Commons and up and down the country, that kept him in a blaze of publicity and added continuously to his reputation. The unrelenting war waged on him by the suffragettes, who were even said to be plotting to kidnap his infant daughter, served as an additional advertisement, and probably did him more good than harm.

The Lloyd George-Churchill strategy was, for the time being at anyrate, triumphantly vindicated. The Peers acted precisely according to plan, and rushed into the trap which had been laid with such ostentation. They allowed themselves to be goaded by calculated provocation into such a state of blind pugnacity as to deprive them of all prudence, or constitutional decency. They flung out the Budget, and allowed the Government to go to the country on the very cry for which it most longed. Even so, the country was in no mood to melodramatize the situation. The swing of the pendulum had been checked, but by no means reversed. Probably more voters who would otherwise have gone Unionist were prevented by fear of Tariff Reform, than by hostility to the Peers. An enormous number of Liberal seats were lost, enough to make it a practical tie between the two main parties, and though the Liberals could count on the support of 40 working-class Socialists, this still left them at the mercy of the Irish Nationalists, who were known to disapprove of the Budget, but were ready to waive their convictions at a price. Which price was not only the setting up of a free state of Catholic Ireland under its own Parliament in Dublin, but the forcible subjugation to it of the Protestant minority in the North East, which, as Lord Ran-

dolph had long ago proclaimed, would fight—and rightly—in such a contingency. A dreadful price, involving the sale of its own Liberal soul by the Liberal Party, and perhaps a plunge into civil war on the eve of a world war.

But they were practical politicians, and the long views of statesmanship had no relevance to a political skin game played according to Lord Randolph's rule of downing the other side at all costs. It would not have been practical politics to allow the Budget to be thrown out on the morrow of an election. And so the price was paid—or rather pledged—and for the moment, the victory appeared complete, with Lloyd George and Winston Churchill for its heroes, since it was they who had devised the plan that had snatched it out of defeat, and it was their energy that had supplied the driving power to carry it through. They had achieved a prestige that had established them as the two political personalities who bulked largest in the public eye. It was certainly the least that Asquith could have done, to move up Churchill from his comparatively inconspicuous office in the Cabinet. But it was a truly Grecian gift that he offered him in the shape of the Irish Secretaryship, a post that, under conditions now certain to develop, was almost bound to be fatal to the reputation of its unfortunate holder. Perhaps it would be uncharitable to suggest that the Premier suspected in what direction Lloyd George's ambition might be tending, and would not have been sorry to put a spoke into his wheel, by relegating his most dangerous potential ally to a convenient blind alley. Asquith was not the man to give away his secrets—or his Premiership if he could help it. In any case, the point was of no practical importance, since Churchill was far too wary to walk into the trap. So he was given, instead, the Home Secretaryship.

## 6.

One is tempted, in recording so picturesque a career as that of Winston Churchill, to concentrate attention on the dramatic high lights, and pass over the record of steady and constructive achievement, which is perhaps of even greater significance in the long run, since it is in the control of one great office of state after another, that the statesman we know today has served his long, and almost unique apprenticeship.

Churchill was only about a year and a half at the Home Office but during that time he succeeded in inscribing a notable chapter of departmental history. And this in a highly characteristic way, for as supreme controller of all His Majesty's prisons he saw his opportunity of doing something to secure a fairer deal for the most friendless and hated section of the community.

For the most engaging, as well as the most persistent of all his traits, has been his generosity to an enemy, and the prisoner is the enemy of society—and a beaten enemy. Like the Pathan, or the

Dervish, or the Boer, he is an enemy with a human side to him, not unworthy of consideration.

Churchill's approach to the criminal was not that of those scientific and statistical reformers, who have succeeded, before now, in giving a new point to the phrase "when Hell freezes". It was not so much that his mind was stirred to action by reports and blue-books, as that his heart was touched by a play, John Galsworthy's *Justice*, in which the actual working of prison conditions on the temperament of a sensitive prisoner was brought home with unforgettable poignancy. And it must have been a pleasure to him rarely experienced by a playgoer, to know that he, alone among the audience, was in a position not only to be touched, but to do something about it.

He had no time, during his brief tenure of office, to carry through an extensive programme of prison reform, but he did succeed in laying down the principles upon which his successors would be able to build in humanizing the system; such, for instance, as reducing solitary confinement to a minimum; eliminating as far as possible the humiliating features from the punishment of those whose offences did not proceed from moral turpitude; abolishing ticket of leave; giving time for the payment of fines; introducing lectures and concerts; and providing treatment outside prison for juvenile offenders. It is upon these principles that the course of reform has proceeded ever since, and it may not be out of place to quote the verdict of Mr. Compton Mackenzie, that Mr. Churchill, when Home Secretary, did most for the convict, while the one to do least was Mr. Clynes, of the Labour Party!\* since Churchill, in his impetuous way, was always swift to mitigate the harshness of the law in any apparently hard case, that, for instance, of a man whom he prevented from being sent to jail for non-payment of a dog-licence, or some youths at Pentonville, whose sentences for some minor offences he caused to be remitted. But there was one case in which his heart got the better of his judgment—that of a certain aged shepherd who had charge of the flocks at Dartmoor prison, and was a veritable master of his craft, since he was able in patriarchal fashion to make the sheep follow him, instead of driving them; and occupied a privileged position, addressing the warders by their Christian names—being, in fact, regarded more in the light of an old prison retainer than a lag. But the poor old fellow unfortunately suffered from incurable kleptomania, and he could never be free for very long without helping himself in some way or other, usually from offertory boxes, and always without violence. But his case had attracted the notice not only of the Home Secretary, but also of his great ally, who was sympathetically moved by the misfortunes of a fellow Welshman, and who saw in his case a shameful and exploitable instance of class tyranny, since on examining what was practically a lifelong record of sentences it certainly did appear that the shepherd had been the victim of savagely harsh treatment, on more than one occasion. Churchill would not have been Churchill

\* *Walls Have Mouths*, by W. F. R. Macartney, p. 171.

had he not felt sorry for this undeniably attractive old sinner, or if his sorrow had not expressed itself in the most practical form, by letting him out of jail, and providing him with an honest job in his own native country. It was unfortunately misplaced kindness, for the shepherd's mental disease had gone far enough to be practically incurable, and he was unable for very long to keep his hands off other people's property. So before long he was back in the job in which he was probably happiest, minding his flock on the Moor, and restrained by a benevolent staff from complicating his life by breaches of the Eighth Commandment. It certainly made Churchill look a little, and Lloyd George more than a little, ridiculous, but an error of this kind is more likely to enhance a man's popularity than otherwise. The popular verdict on Winston was that he had after all shown himself a good fellow, even if, in this one instance, he had been a shade too good a fellow. And his Tory critics cut little ice by denouncing him as a pinch-beck Haroun al Raschid.

After all, these interventions of his, fortunate or otherwise, kept people talking about him, and every little bit of publicity had the same sort of suggestive value as the repeated obtrusion of some familiar name on the hoardings; it conditioned the popular mind to recognize him for one of those men who, whether you admire or hate them, have already attained historic stature, and whose effigies will one day assist in cluttering up still further the North transept at Westminster. The importance of a democratic statesman is what the people think it, and his skill is in making them think that they have thought it of their own accord.

But the greatest publicity drama was enacted under bleak December skies in the drab environment of Houndsditch. Mr. Churchill must have felt his fighting style sadly cramped in an office whose nearest approach to martial activity was provided by the perpetual guerilla of the suffragettes. And nobody, surely, but himself, would have contrived to stage a pitched battle with musketry, cannon, and flaming masonry all complete. He was summoned from his bath, with the news that certain notorious foreign criminals, then known as anarchists, but whom we should now call gangsters, who had sent a thrill of horror through the country by shooting down some unarmed policemen a few days previously, and getting clean away, had been cornered in a house in Sidney Street, and were maintaining a fusillade at everyone who came in range. Churchill lost no time in directing a sensational concentration of military and police force to carry on the siege in form, and himself motored down to the scene of the fun, to revive his old memories of being under fire, and to take supreme command. He was the same boy, hardly grown up, who had delighted, long after the normal age, in playing soldiers. And his intervention bore useful fruit; for when the fire service arrived, and insisted on braving all risks in discharge of their normal duty, the Home Secretary very properly ordered them to stand by, and let the house burn and roast its garrison of two to a

frazzle, rather than risk a single innocent life. Once again he was laughed at, and frowned at, for his part in this escapade; but he was talked about more than ever, and the ordinary man thought all the more sympathetically of him, for his schoolboy enthusiasm for seeing all the best bits of the cinema.

Meanwhile the political struggle had been taking what was now its inevitable course, amid increasing sound and fury, part of which was according to the conventional rules of the game, but with which more and more of genuine rancour was beginning to mingle. The bargain between the Liberals and the Irish had been successfully fixed up, and now that the Nationalist weight was duly thrown into the scale against the Lords, nothing could deliver these noble constitution-breakers from the consequences of their folly. Churchill, still in close partnership with Lloyd George, was in the forefront of the campaign, but his part was still that of second to the man who was coming more and more to dominate the political scene. At no time could the course of affairs be said to have been determined by Churchill's initiative, though he figured often enough in those dramatic incidents in which he seemed to specialize, especially now that he and his friend F. E. Smith had made a regular practice of launching their keenest shafts of invective across the floor of the House at each other. For Churchill's oratorical technique was no longer limited to set speeches, but by assiduous practice had rendered him a worthy antagonist of the famous barrister himself in the cut and thrust of debating repartee, a truly wonderful feat when we consider his initial impediment of speech.

Life must have been gloriously full for him. No one alive will ever experience anything comparable to the hectic enjoyment and care-free profusion of upper-class society during those days when taxes were light and prices cheap; when a bank balance was a magic talisman to set multitudes of human gnomes, in any part of the world, toiling to minister to one's least whim; and when Germany was principally associated in the minds of many of the best people with the cures that they were annually constrained to undergo in order to counteract the effects of their own Gargantuan standard of living.

But in these last years before the deluge, when the clouds were already beginning to blacken the sky, and the peals of approaching thunder to recur with an even more menacing insistence, there was no longer the steady pursuit of pleasure, as of right and routine, and always on the edge of boredom, that had sufficed for the social magnates of the *fin de siècle*. There was at the back of all men's minds, an apprehension that no one dared to formulate, of something coming, something already almost overdue, that would sweep away all this pleasant existence like a house built on sand. What yet remained of its pleasures could not be enjoyed too fast or too furiously.

And this same sense of hectic expectancy pervaded the whole atmosphere of the time, and spread to all classes of society. Everybody seemed to be engaged in a concerted effort to ginger up the

tempo of life to the syncopated rhythm of a voodoo witch dance, with all inhibitions tabooed. The criminal hysteria of the suffragettes, the epidemic of strikes, the unpatriotic recklessness with which each side in the political game sought to score off the other—these things were symptomatic of a civilization almost conscious that its time was short, and determined to make the most of it.

Churchill flung himself into this dance of life or death with as furious an energy as anyone, but he was set on too lofty an end ever to be caught by it, and whirled round in meaningless circles like so many of those among whom his lot was cast. He was in Society, in the sense of the illustrated magazines, without ever being of it. Even if he had been ever so much given that way, he had not anything like the financial resources for a life of conscientious enjoyment according to the most approved standards. If he enjoyed, as he did, an excellent dinner, it was most of all for the sake of the conversation, and the fruitful personal contacts—the feast was never an end in itself, and pleasure not a master, but a slave. Even when, in the Autumn of 1910, he had the delightful experience of a trip among the Greek isles, and to the Bosphorus, on the yacht of the millionaire Baron de Forest, with his friend and opponent, F. E. Smith, as one of the company, he made it all fit into the larger scheme, and did not fail to get into intimate touch with the leading statesmen of the new Young Turkish order at Constantinople, and even to sound the mind of the grim German Ambassador, Marschall von Bieberstein, one of the most ruthless champions in the as yet undeclared war for world power, in which Germany was manœuvring for position.

Not only the social round, but even the great political contest of which he was in the forefront, and that was being waged with such bitter intensity at home—even this, one feels, was to him in the nature of a bridge, to be passed over and left behind as quickly as possible—or shall we say of a game of polo, into which one throws oneself with all one's power and all one's might to the end of the last chukka.

Looking back at it now we can see that the really significant feature of this contest of the party, or people, against the Peers, was that it should ever be taking place at all, at such a time; and that what really mattered was not the victory of one side or another, but whether it would be possible for men of goodwill on both sides to break off the whole miserable business and in so doing to bar the dire consequences that were bound to ensue if the Liberal-Irish bargain were to be fulfilled to the end. The new King—for Edward VII had passed from the scene while the contest was at its height—was desperately anxious to arrange peace with honour between the contending factions; and what was even more remarkable, Lloyd George himself, whose statesmanlike capacity few had suspected, had, unbeknown to the public at large, put forward a suggestion for what would have been a national government, with a mandate to effect a general settlement of major domestic issues on an agreed, and

patriotic, basis, and in fact to unite all Britons in the presence of a common danger. How much the conception of this wise and hopeful project owed to Lloyd George's most intimate ally, is not yet revealed, except in so far as we know Churchill to have been one of the few originally in the secret. But it is so thoroughly in accord with the whole trend of his genius, that it would be surprising indeed if it should prove that he had not a decisive part in it.

The leaders on both sides could not help agreeing in principle on what was so obviously the right thing to do. But when Balfour, whose authority as leader was steadily being undermined, referred the suggestion to the wirepullers of his caucus, it soon became evident that it was not practical politics, and so the whole project died still-born. Even if Ireland had to sweat blood, or the Empire be caught at a fatal disadvantage, the shibboleths must be maintained inviolate, and the game played to a finish. And if it had to be a game, nobody was going to play it out with more convincing rigour than Churchill himself. That was one result of his choleric and combative temperament. But it was a tragedy that he should have been condemned to play it, instead of the far greater game for which Providence, and his own innermost aspiration, had destined him.

There was the usual amount of colour and drama incidental to his part, in the forcing through of the Parliament Bill, by which the Government sought to cripple the power of the Second Chamber, and which, when passed, was to remain, for at least thirty years, a dead letter on the Statute Book—but the thing most worth recording was that he should ever have been condemned to play it. The proceedings, for him, were enlivened, more even than for the ordinary run of Cabinet ministers, by the attentions of the suffragettes, whom he appeared to take a special pleasure in infuriating, and whom he drove into ecstasies of rage when he unexpectedly threw his weight into the balance against a so-called conciliation bill for women's franchise, on the ground that it was not democratic enough. From one of these gentle amazons, he was constrained, for the best of reasons, to the rape of a dog whip; while an infatuated undergraduate errant was only just prevented, by his police escort, from tanning him in the corridor of a railway carriage.

It was all exciting enough while it lasted, but it was marking time, though at the double, as far as his real career was concerned. And then, in the midsummer of 1911, a German gunboat steamed to an anchorage in a Moorish harbour of whose name, Agadir, hardly anyone had ever heard—and his chance came.

## 7.

During that third quarter of the year 1911, England had for the first time woken up to the consciousness that a European war, with herself in the brunt of it, was not only a theoretical possibility, but almost more likely than not to break out in the course of the next few



weeks, or even days. Lloyd George, though a known pacifist, had electrified the whole country with a speech which amounted to an ultimatum to Germany to withdraw that same tiny ship from French-controlled water, or take on France and England together. It seemed almost unbelievable that the Kaiser would submit to the public humiliation of having his bluff called. Little was said, even in the rowdiest of the press—a silence more ominous than the most tearing defiance. But word was passed from mouth to mouth of movements of ships, of leave stopped in the army. A great railway strike collapsed with mysterious suddenness—it was rumoured that the settlement had been rushed through, not without the good offices of the Home Secretary, on urgent patriotic grounds.

That was not all Mr. Churchill found to do. For he had discovered that the two magazines, containing the cordite without which the Dreadnoughts of the fleet would be no longer gun platforms but targets, were unguarded, and at the mercy of any score or so of armed desperadoes who might be put up to seize them. Winston Churchill's vivid strategic imagination grasped at once the vital need, and rushing away from a garden party, he 'phoned up the Admiralty, begging for guards of marines to be placed on each of them. The Admiral in charge, presumably one of the junior Sea Lords, knew that, according to some regulation or other, this was not an Admiralty job, and consequently had no hesitation in giving a good snub to the interfering civilian. Haldane, at the War Office, though a civilian himself, was made of different stuff, and promptly rushed military guards to each magazine, so that the Germans lost whatever chance they may have had of paralyzing the naval arm before a shot was fired.

Perhaps they may have been less quick than Churchill to realize the opportunity. Anyhow, what might have become a world war petered out, as summer declined into Autumn, into a close haggle between Germany and France for certain readjustments of colonial territory; and the little ship, having served her purpose as a bargaining counter, got up steam, and was soon no more than a trail of smoke on the Western horizon. But Germany had had to draw in her horns in a way that she was never likely to forgive—or to repeat. The next crisis would be no bluff, but a head-on collision.

War, though postponed, was palpably in the air; and a mind in arms, like Churchill's, could not be kept within civilian trammels. It was in the middle of August that the Home Secretary stepped aside from the business of his department to draw up, for the benefit of the Imperial General Staff, a memorandum in which he surveyed the military situation on the Continent, and sketched the probable course, on the Western Front, of the war that might at any moment have been precipitated. This can hardly fail to be ranked as among the most extraordinary feats of prophetic appreciation on human record, for at a time when the various general staffs of Europe were wildly out in their calculations, he outlined,

with substantial accuracy, the course that the campaign was actually destined to follow in 1914; the irresistible sweep of the German right wing through Belgium; the battles on the Frontier; the French armies, with the British expeditionary force, hurled back from the line of the Meuse *on the twentieth day*; the drive through France to the outskirts of Paris; the accumulation of difficulties for the Germans on their exterior lines; and the chance for the French to make a great and decisive recovery *on the fortieth day*. All this, even to the two dates, is weirdly and almost precisely accurate.

We can, of course, try to explain it as a mere lucky shot; but when we find Churchill registering a bull, while no one else has anything more than an outer, it is only fair to credit him with marksmanship of exceptional, if not supreme, proficiency.

The British public breathed freely again on the passing of the crisis, and was, on the whole, satisfied with the brave front that had been presented to Germany. But behind the scene there were grave searchings of heart. That little affair of the magazine guards was symptomatic of the way in which the War Office and Admiralty were working at cross purposes. For Lord Haldane, who had undergone his intellectual training at Göttingen under the supervision of the great Professor Lotze, had laboured to equip the army with a thinking and planning organ in the shape of a General Staff. The Admiralty, on the other hand, had elected to go on its own traditional way, under the supervision of practical sailors, without any attempt to introduce these new, highbrow, notions. The result was that while the army was laying its plans for one sort of war, the navy was envisaging a totally different one, and anything like co-ordinated planning was practically ruled out.

Haldane was convinced—and he had succeeded in convincing Asquith—that before the next crisis came along, it was imperative to end this state of things by bringing the navy into line with the sister service, and equipping it, too, with a general staff. McKenna, for all his sterling qualities, was not the man to do this; for it was his modest instinct to let the admirals run their own job in their own way, and to act as their loyal mouthpiece in Parliament and the Cabinet. Haldane himself was desperately anxious to apply the new broom; but this, Asquith thought, would have been too open a slight on the Senior Service.

For perhaps the only ascertainable time in his career, Asquith was visited by something like a flash of positive inspiration. He had perhaps been impressed by the way in which the Home Secretary had been devoting himself to the military aspect of the crisis. If there was any civilian with enough confidence in his own judgment to ride his views on naval policy roughshod over a whole Board of Admirals, this was the man. Besides, he may perhaps have reflected, there could be no surer way of dissolving the Churchill-Lloyd George combination for starving the services, than by identifying Winston's career with one of them. No one had better reason to know what a

temperamental urge he had to magnify the importance of any office of which he was head. The zeal of the poacher turned gamekeeper is proverbial.

He visited Asquith in Scotland, and the Premier no doubt took a final opportunity of sounding his mind. Anyhow that afternoon after his arrival they were coming home from a round on the links, when Asquith suddenly sprung on him a proposal that he should change offices with McKenna. It is hardly necessary to say that this time he jumped at the offer.

Here then was the King's navy deprived of the ruler who had saved it from what might have been irreparable disaster, to make room for him against whose ill-advised machinations he had only just succeeded in saving it! Another of those situations in which real life contrives to out-Gilbert the Gilbertian. And yet how many are there who would condemn Asquith's choice on that account today? There may be times when the most outrageous decision is the right one.

Churchill was in a mood of high exultation, fed by the sight of distant battleships on the Firth of Forth, and the thought of the German army manœuvres, which he had attended again two years before, and which had impressed him more than ever with the might of what now figured in everyone's mind as "the enemy". Asquith's household arrangements, it is interesting to note, included the provision of a large Bible in the guest's bedroom; and Winston, with that mysticism of his that comes to the surface in times of great emotional stress, resorted to the mild form of divination that consists in opening the Book at hazard.

It was the passage in Deuteronomy about "a people great and tall, the children of the Anakims" whom Jehovah should drive out from before the children of Israel. Equate Anak with Germany and Israel with England, and "it seemed", as he says "a message of reassurance."

## V.

### PRE-WAR

#### I.

**T**HUS DID Churchill, on undertaking his great task, look to strength from a higher source. But it is nowhere recorded that even Jehovah has seen fit to vouchsafe guidance in the mysteries of specialized technique, and it is that of which the civilian, dumped incontinently into the control of a modern navy, stands in the most urgent need. Pure strategic intuition gives more obvious scope to the amateur in the military than in the naval sphere, where what seems obvious so

seldom turns out to be free from some technical snag. And such martial training as Churchill had received had been almost exclusively military.

But his faith in himself and his mission was proof against discouragement, or even hesitation. He had come to the Admiralty to effect a revolution in policy, and to infuse a new spirit, and he was determined that nothing and nobody should stand in his way. He was not in the least daunted by the fact that he was in the position of a landsman with less sea-knowledge than the humblest midshipman, put to skipper a crew of admirals. For he believed that this very absorption of the sailors in the technique of their profession might be a source of weakness as well as of strength. The sailor, by the very nature of his calling, is compelled to live in the limited and self-contained world constituted by his ship; and the problems with which he has to deal are of the most insistent practicality. He has little leisure or opportunity for detached thought, or for wider views. "The Silent Service", as Churchill himself says, "was not mute because it was absorbed in thought and study, but because it was weighted down by its daily routine, and its ever-competent and diversifying technique. We had competent administrators, brilliant experts of every description . . . but at the outset of the conflict we had more captains of ships than captains of war."\* Hence the need for an organized thinking department, a general staff for the navy as well as the army; and here was the opportunity for a non-technician whose mind was accustomed to the widest views of statesmanship and strategy, to provide it with one, or even to impose one upon it. After all, when you could not persuade a high-placed admiral to lift a finger to guard the navy's vital reserves of ammunition, there was reason for suspecting some serious defect of thinking power in naval high places.

Now it so happened that not only did the Board of Admiralty present an almost solid front of opposition against any such land-lubberly interference with its traditional habits, but the First Sea Lord stood for the best type of the old-fashioned school, and in uncompromising opposition to any fundamental change. He was Admiral Sir A. K.—or, as the navy had christened him, Tug—Wilson, on account of his reputation for being always pulling, tugging, or hauling, at some practical job of seamanship. He was not only in the literal, but in the heroic sense that Carlyle had used the expression, a silent man, to whom, as Churchill aptly says, "everything was duty . . . one did one's duty as well as one possibly could, be it great or small, and naturally, one deserved no reward". And Wilson, had he been capable of thinking it out so explicitly, would certainly have said with Goethe, "But what is your duty? The claims of the day."

Such a temperament had no point of possible contact with that of the eloquent and visionary young statesman; and nothing

\* *World Crisis*, Vol. I, p. 93.

could be more clear, from the first, than that Wilson's mind was hermetically sealed against any proposal for allowing a staff of theorists in Whitehall to impose its views on admirals afloat and responsible, or to train officers in any other school than that of practical seamanship. "The service", he said, in a paper in which he formulated his objections, "would have the most supreme contempt for any body of officers who professed to be specially trained to think . . . officers are judged by what they can do when afloat."

The deadlock was fundamental. Whether Churchill was right or Wilson, it was clear that the Admiralty could not hold both of them. Accordingly Wilson quietly and uncomplainingly, as his manner was, retired three months before his normal term from his great office, the supreme prize of every admiral's ambition, although at the time he was generally regarded in the Service as the ablest seaman on the active list. And his retirement was only part of a general purge, in which admirals were sacked right and left, in order to provide a clear field for the policy of the new First Lord. A new Board was appointed of men of warrantable conformability, headed by Sir Francis Bridgeman, a safe and undistinguished man, with no itch to assert himself. But even he failed to come up to requirements, on the score of health, and in a year's time he was flung out with such startling abruptness as to lead to a debate in Parliament. There was no doubt that Churchill felt the hand of the Lord upon him, as it had been upon Joshua.

## 2.

Never had any First Lord thrown himself into his task with such passionate ardour. He was as proud of the Service as Nelson, and indefatigable in making himself personally familiar with every detail of it. The Admiralty yacht, *Enchantress*, became a second home to him, and, as he himself records, he visited every dockyard, shipyard, and naval establishment at home or in the Mediterranean, and every important ship. He examined for himself every piece of Admiralty property and got to know what everything looked like and what everything was. He had no thought now about stinting the navy of funds; he had come to key it up to fighting pitch against those gentle Germans of two years ago, who had now turned into the sons of Anak.

This involved a whole series of problems bristling with technical difficulties, and even Churchill's assurance might have wavered, unless it had been fortified by the advice and inspiration of an acknowledged master in such matters. Such aid and comfort he derived from the friendship he had formed with Wilson's predecessor as First Sea Lord, the veteran Lord Fisher, who had succeeded in impressing himself on the public imagination as a heaven-sent naval genius, and the *beau ideal* of all that a sailor ought to be.

And certainly Fisher presented one of the most forceful and vivid

personalities of this, or any time; for he was possessed of a demonic energy not inferior to that of Churchill himself, and one that was perpetually finding vent in unrestrained violence of speech and action. In fact, if Fisher had not been known to be a very able seaman, it would have been difficult to take him seriously, so completely did he contrive to reproduce, and even caricature, the breezy salt of the melodrama or musical-comedy stage. He expressed himself in a quick fire of explosive interjections, more in the style of a gushing flapper, with a dash of the bargee; and he could never find enough underlines, notes of exclamation, expletives, emphatics, and superlatives, to do justice to the violence of his emotions; the First Lord was to him "my beloved Winston", until such time as charcoal sprouted or Hell froze, phenomena that were liable to occur on the slightest provocation or change of mood. Fisher's violence resembled that of a hopelessly spoilt child, and broke forth with as little consideration of consequences. He had, for instance, in a public pronouncement, when First Sea Lord, expressed a desire to fall upon, and "Copenhagen", the German fleet without a declaration of war, a propaganda gift that must have been almost as valuable to Tirpitz as another couple of battleships! One of his habitual poses was, in fact, that of an uncompromising brutality, and he made no secret of his desire to kick an enemy in the stomach and hit him when he was down. He carried this cult of frightfulness into his dealings with that service to which Nelson had bequeathed the spirit of brotherhood. He had all a spoilt child's determination to make his own personal will everyone else's law; of those who dared oppose or differ from him in any way he declared that he would make their wives widows and their houses dunghills. As even the most rigid discipline had not succeeded in skippering the navy entirely with yes-men, one result of his First Sea-lordship was to split it from top to bottom by an unseamanly faction fight of Fisherites and anti-Fisherites. And now in his old age this cultivated unrestraint had begun to take the form of self-conscious exhibitionism. He found that it amused people, from Edward VII downwards, and that by playing up to their expectations he acquired the privileged status of jester in ordinary to the nation, and in consequence could get his way more easily than ever.

He had first met Churchill at Biarritz in 1907, and the two had struck up a friendship as violent as every other emotional reaction of Fisher's. To this he had written the word "finis" with apparently irrevocable finality, on the occasion of Winston's attack on the construction programme. "The tongue", he wrote, "is the very devil. (N.B.—Yours is slung amidships and wags at both ends)." Even so the wire was never quite broken between them, though Fisher, even in retirement, remained uncompromisingly loyal to McKenna.

When the change at the Admiralty occurred, Churchill lost no time in taking steps to repair the breach, and was said to have

expressed his desire to lean on Fisher. It needed all McKenna's magnanimity to persuade the old Admiral to make peace with his supplanter, and that only after he had been assured that Winston had had no hand himself in the change. A three days' meeting that was arranged between them at Reigate Priory cemented the alliance firmer than ever. Even so, there was one reservation on Winston's side, in that he did not take the opportunity of bringing him back to his post on Wilson's retirement. For one thing Fisher was quite as much opposed to the creating of a naval staff as Wilson, if only for the reason that he was an autocrat whose *sine qua non* it was to run the whole show himself, according to his own notions.

But there was a more fundamental objection. For if Fisher was one autocrat, Churchill was another, and their association as First Lord and First Sea Lord was about as certain to result in a duel of elimination as any arrangement that could possibly have been devised. The fact was that of all the temperaments Churchill had encountered in the course of his career, Fisher's was the one that most closely resembled his own. Add the third of a century to his age, and imagine him to have been brought up in the same environment, and he would in all human probability have been "Jackie's" spiritual twin—if we can ever imagine him running quite to such lengths of extravagance.

Now a working relationship between two such characters could only be one in which there could be no clash of authority. Fisher had got on excellently with McKenna at the Admiralty, because that self-effacing minister had desired nothing better than to give his First Sea Lord a perfectly free hand, and his own loyal support; but nothing could be more certain than that Winston could not be head of any show without insisting on running it according to his own notions, a thing that Fisher could never conceivably have tolerated. But if Churchill were to be left in unlimited control, with a pliant Board, and Fisher inspiring and prompting him in the capacity of a private friend, the natural similarity of their two characters would become a source not of discord, but of harmony.

And it may be reasonable to surmise that Fisher himself was, in his old age, better suited to inspire a show than to run it. He was essentially a visionary; his mind was in a state of perpetual frenzy, which may have been divine, but had nothing in it of scientific detachment; it worked with almost superhuman driving power, and was guided by lightning flashes of intuition. But in the rare cases in which old men retain the fullness of their youthful energy, it almost invariably resembles the discharge of a cannon, whose mountings have gone to rust, so that it can only be fired in one direction. Fisher had after all served his apprenticeship in the Crimean War, and he had achieved his fame as a scientific sailor when commanding the *Inflexible* at Alexandria, with her masts fitted for sails, and her 80-ton muzzle-loaders. It was wonderful how he had made progress his principle ever since—but it was too

much to expect that his mind could go on adapting itself in details as well as principle to the perpetually revolutionized conditions of mechanized war. And finally, with his notoriously increasing garrulousness and extravagance, was it safe to rely on him for that coolness of judgment which Napoleon described as the first quality of a general, and one lapse of which, in the directing of the British Navy, might spell irreparable disaster?

Churchill, then, giving practical shape, through his team of admirals, to Fisher's ideas, and adding the force of Fisher's drive to his own, would seem to have chosen the only way in which a civilian could have the remotest hope of running the navy, instead of merely acting as its Parliamentary mouthpiece. And certainly it was a time of the most furious and drastic preparation for the war that Fisher, with an intuition hardly less uncanny than Churchill's, had predicted, three years in advance, would break out in October 1914.

Churchill was thoroughly at one with Fisher in his desire to see the navy pulsing with vitality and thoroughly up to date, and he was determined to cut ruthlessly through every obstruction of official red tape, and brush aside all opposition. Fisher's idea, which he had no difficulty in imparting to Churchill, was always to go one better than the Germans. What he had already done in the *Dreadnought*, he proposed to repeat in a super-Dreadnought, armed with a bigger gun, and of a higher speed, than any they were building, and thus to consign Tirpitz's armada to obsolescence as soon as it was completed. Churchill took a very considerable risk in ordering these monster guns before there had been time to try them out properly, but all went well. There was however—such are the pitfalls of naval construction—an even greater risk in Fisher's cry for "more speed—less armour", how terrible a risk was demonstrated at Jutland.

There was also the conversion of the fleet from a coal to an oil-fuel basis, one on which Fisher, who as long ago as 1886 had been known as the Oil Maniac, was particularly keen, but which involved vast and complicated changes; and it was a happy thought of Churchill's to have persuaded Fisher to preside over a commission whose object it was to make a world-wide survey of Britain's potential resources in this, for her, far less accessible source of power.

In this new drive, all thought of cutting down expenditure was thrown to the winds. The principles that had been impressed with such solemnity upon the Dundee electors, were consigned to the limbo of political nostrums that have served their turn, and the Germans, who had been simple enough to rejoice at the advent of the arch-pacifist to the Admiralty, were now aghast at his British lack of consistency. Churchill was, in a far more aggressive spirit than McKenna had ever displayed, ready to hold the threat of his resignation, with his Board to back him, over the heads of his colleagues, at the least disposition to jib at his demands. And they



dared not say him nay, for they were too much afraid of another Dreadnought panic; and perhaps by this time they had even begun to be afraid of the Germans.

But the great drive at the Admiralty did not confine itself to machines. Fisher had laid it down that favouritism is the basis of efficiency, which, though he had been apt to apply it in only too literal a sense, may be interpreted as an autocratic determination to staff the key posts with the best men, regardless of seniority, or any other consideration. Churchill needed no incitement to apply this principle with dictatorial ruthlessness. Not only, as it was said at the time, did he knock over admirals like ninepins, but partly by Fisher's inspiration, and partly by his own, he fastened on those in whose control he most desired to see the navy on "the Day" against which he was preparing it with such desperate energy.

Both he and Fisher had their respective prime favourites. Fisher's choice was curious, since it had fastened on Admiral Jellicoe, than whom there was no more capable or scientific officer in the Service, but whose excess of caution imparted to him the exact opposite of the Nelson, and the Fisher, touch. But he successfully impressed Churchill with the all-importance of having Jellicoe in command of the Grand Fleet when the hour struck. Churchill's selection was more recognizably in character, for his eye had lit on the youngest flag officer in the fleet, David Beatty, an extremely picturesque, not to say slightly theatrical character, who went about with the peak of his cap always jauntily tilted over his eye, and whom Churchill had first met at Omdurman, when Beatty was in command of a gunboat. Churchill was attracted to him not, if we may judge from his own account, by considerations of seamanship or technical competence, but partly because the young Admiral's service on land had induced him to approach naval problems from a military standpoint, and partly because of his prowess in the hunting field—his father having belonged to Churchill's own regiment of Hussars. Beatty first became Churchill's private secretary, and then, in the Spring of 1913, was appointed over the heads of all his seniors to command the First Battle Cruiser Squadron—"the strategic cavalry of the navy". It was a brilliant appointment, and has been so regarded ever since, in all but certain naval circles, which have questioned whether an officer of so little experience in command was really quite up to the extremely complicated and—to the layman—recondite work of training it up to the highest pitch of technical efficiency. And when, at Jutland, five German battle cruisers proved more than a match for six English, there were those who wondered whether even the hunting field had been successful in inculcating that past knowledge of gunnery and signalling that were the prime, though perhaps not the most obvious, qualifications for his task.

It was over this question of appointments that the Churchill and Fisher partnership, even in its loose and unofficial form, came to the

verge of shipwreck. The First Lord had seen fit to promote three admirals, and duly notified the fact to his mentor, who promptly sat down to dash off a letter to his beloved Winston, which he described as the last communication he would ever have with him or the Admiralty in any matter at all, and in which he accused him of having betrayed the navy by this apparently unintentional lapse from pure Fisherité orthodoxy. The enraged old man was even preparing to shake the dust of England off his feet, and end his days in voluntary exile in the United States. Of course he was calmed down, and the broken wire was quickly repaired—but if such could be his conduct when in a position of no authority at all, what hope could there be of these two turbulent spirits achieving harmony, if Fisher should ever be recalled to his former post at the Admiralty?

3.

Nobody realized more than Churchill himself what a vast and terrifying responsibility rested upon his shoulders. Even in the humblest pleasure craft there is a familiar notice that says "Do not speak to the man at the wheel", and how much more should this undivided concentration be the right, and the duty, of one whose slightest lapse may be fatal to the Ship of State? One would have thought that the lowest demand of sanity would have been the withdrawal of the First Lord from the hurly-burly of party controversy.

Sane or not, there was no question of such patriotic isolation for Winston Churchill. He remained in the forefront of what may well come to rank as the most calamitous faction fight of Parliamentary history; and all men of goodwill today will join with him in the hope that British political leaders will never allow themselves to be goaded into the excesses of partisanship with which both sides disgraced the year 1914, or, he might have added, the whole period between the passing of the Parliament Act in 1911 to the outbreak of the Great War. It is as if the nemesis of her dark record in Ireland, the curse of Elizabeth and Cromwell, of the Penal Laws and the Black Famine, were being wreaked upon England in the hour of her greatest peril. The position was this; there were in Ireland not one nation but two, Catholic and Protestant, bitterly and intolerantly hostile to one another, and—what made things worse than ever—with overlapping frontiers and indeterminate boundaries. From the refusal to recognize this, a train of tragically grotesque consequences ensued. Britain, whose cause was the cause of freedom, had for more than a century been committed to imposing a hated yoke, by force, on the larger of the two Irish nations. The Liberal Party proposed to end this by giving Catholic Ireland a qualified freedom under her own Parliament, but at the same time assisting her to impose an equally hated yoke on the Protestants in the North-East, to which, as Randolph Churchill had only too truly pointed out, they would

die rather than submit. The Tories, who supported the Protestants in this attitude, were thus committed to championing the principle of rebellion in arms against the State; and the Liberals, by an even more monstrous paradox, to employing British bayonets and cannon to drive contented British subjects into subjection to the avowed enemies of the British Crown and flag—for by no other means could Home Rule conceivably be forced upon the whole of Ireland.

We are not concerned here with the wider aspects of this sordid struggle, but only with the part that the First Lord of the Admiralty elected, or was forced, to play in it. For he, like everybody else concerned, was under the compulsion of that evil thing called, with dreadful, if unconscious irony, practical politics. He was fighting the same desperate battle that McKenna had had to fight against him, for money for the fleet; and, in his own words, "in order to strengthen myself with my party, I mingled actively in the Irish controversy".

Let us give him the credit, that is his due, for having, from the first, taken a wider and more statesmanlike view of the problem than almost any of the leading politicians, with the possible exception of Lloyd George. They both, as he himself assures us, had, from the earliest discussions in 1909, advocated the exclusion of Ulster from any scheme of Home Rule; though it is difficult to see how any man of sense or principle—and particularly Liberal principle—could conceivably have done otherwise. But then, why should it have been necessary to afford the first public intimation of this attitude ten years, or more, after the fact? The answer, of course, is practical politics. It was not so nominated in the bond with the Irish leader, Mr. Redmond, nor would Redmond, terrorized as he himself was by revolutionary forces behind him and beyond his control, have dared to sell the Nationalist support at any lower price than that of a compulsorily united Ireland. And "do right though the heavens fall" does not figure among the maxims of practical politicians. The great thing was to get the Lords business settled by giving Redmond the Bill he wanted, Ulster and all, and lying low about any necessity there might be of eventually bilking him.

So for the nonce politics held the field, and for Churchill, as for Lloyd George, statesmanship had to be put into cold storage for a more propitious season. Meanwhile, even before the fatal and irrevocable step was taken of introducing a Home Rule Bill without any concession to the Protestant demand for exclusion, it had become only too evident that the stage was set for the literal fulfilment of Lord Randolph's prediction—Ulster would fight.

How far Ulster would be right we need not presume to determine, since we have Mr. Churchill's own mature verdict on record. Its unconstitutional resistance, he says, "will be judged by history in relation to the fact that the Ulster Protestants believed that the Home Rule Bills were driven forward not as a result of British

convictions, but by the leverage of . . . Irish voting power. That the lawless demonstrations in Ulster were the parent of many grievous ills cannot be doubted; but if Ulster had confined herself simply to constitutional agitation, it is extremely improbable that she would have escaped forcible inclusion in a Dublin Parliament." \* No fairer statement of the case could be desired.

The danger signals were plainly out. The fierce and intolerant fanaticism that was never very far below the Protestant surface was already inflamed to the point of potential rebellion, and the movement had found a leader after its own heart in Sir Edward Carson. And such was the nature of the Parliament Act, as to render it certain that an interval of over two years would be granted for the Protestants, with the naked menace to their liberty staring them in the face, to organize a war of independence. Elementary common-sense, to say nothing of patriotism, would surely have enjoined the utmost tact and conciliation to prevent the situation getting out of hand!

But not practical politics. Ulster was the enemy; and it was the ministerial cue to apply the most exquisite means of exasperation, by openly ridiculing the Protestant preparations, and suggesting that they were nothing but bluff, which was a more powerful incitement to rebel in earnest than any that Carson could have supplied. Such language for instance as Churchill's, "I daresay when the worst comes to the worst, we shall find that civil war evaporates in uncivil words."

That was in the Autumn of 1911; it was early in the following year, while the Protestant fury was steadily rising in anticipation of the hated Bill, that he went on to offer the most flaming challenge that ingenuity could have devised, by arranging to address a Home Rule gathering, in company with Redmond himself, in the Ulster Hall at Belfast. Both hall and speaker bore symbolic associations, since it was from that very platform that his father had delivered the historic speech in which he had incited Ulster to resist Home Rule to the constitutional limit—and beyond. No one who had the least acquaintance with Belfast could have had any doubt in what spirit this would have been taken, and it became a point of honour with the Protestants to prevent such desecration of their historic meeting-house. Nothing less than a bloody riot, on a vast scale, could have resulted from the attempt to consummate the insult. Even Churchill was persuaded, very much against his will, to give way over the question of the hall, and consent to the meeting being transferred to a marquee on a football ground. Even so, a literal army—seven battalions and a squadron of cavalry—had to be brought in, at great public expense, to reinforce the police, nor is it certain that even these would have been enough to protect him, had not the Protestant leaders placarded the streets with orders to keep the peace, and in fact given an impressive demonstration of the military discipline they could enforce on their followers. Churchill

\* *Great Contemporaries*, p. 147.

was driven through surging crowds, who pressed round his carriage, vociferating the direst imprecations; but in such a situation he was at his best, and gave not the least sign of flinching. Had he done so, they might all have been on him like a swarm of infuriated bees.

He went through the form of firing off a bellicose exhortation to an audience of picked supporters, who needed no such stimulant. But the whole affair had produced exactly the opposite effect to that which had been intended; for it was interpreted throughout Ireland—where a disinterested love for free speech had nowhere taken root—as a victory for an Irish army over an English Government, which had publicly backed down to the threat of force, a lesson not likely to be lost on either Protestants or Catholics. And it is tragic to think that it was straight from the sowing of these dragon's teeth that the First Lord should have crossed to Glasgow, to deliver a solemn warning to Germany that Britain, though eager to respond to any slackening of naval rivalry, was determined to maintain at all costs her mastery of the seas.

#### 4.

The time during which the Home Rule Bill was being forced three times through the Commons, in order, ostensibly, to be carried under the Parliament Act, saw British politics at a depth of degradation that no one in the Victorian age could have imagined possible. The triumph of the new spirit was signalized by the ousting of Balfour, who was considered too gentlemanly and intellectual, from the Unionist leadership, to make way for an almost complete nonentity, in Bonar Law, who, though among the most worthy and lovable of individuals behind the scenes, could be trusted to play the party game in the world's eye with its full rigour and recklessness of consequences. Ulster intransigence was sedulously fomented by scorn on the one side and encouragement on the other; and the dour Protestants, who had bound themselves together in solemn Covenant never to submit or yield, were now openly arming and organizing to die for their liberties.

Throughout this turmoil, Winston Churchill was condemned, by choice or necessity, to lead a double existence. In his capacity of First Lord he was the patriot statesman, working night and day to secure that the fleet, his country's vital arm, should not be found wanting in the hour of supreme trial that might come like a thief in the night; in his capacity as politician he was committed to the ostensible championship of a project in which he did not really believe, and to exacerbating a dispute that was viewed by the Germans as a veritable godsend. Realizing this, one fails even to be amused at the record of such typical scenes as one in the House, in which a prominent Unionist so far lost control of himself as to toss a book of the Speaker's orders into the First Lord's face, followed of course by the customary ritual of apology and reconciliation; or of

Churchill's scoring a point off Carson by talking of Ulster seceding to Germany. It may have been a game, but it was playing with Hell fire.

In the middle of 1913, he suffered another brisk, though momentary distraction, on the fringe of the nearest British approach to the sort of scandal only too familiar in Continental politics. Certain ministers were accused of investments in a company directly, or indirectly, interested in a Government contract for Marconi wireless stations; conduct that on the most favourable interpretation showed a lack of discretion and delicacy, less than which would have been enough to wreck the career of any Victorian statesman. Perhaps the most unsavoury feature of the whole business was the Parliamentary committee set up to investigate the charges, whose members, with the honourable exception of the chairman, threw to the winds all pretence of judicial honour, and proceeded on both sides to treat it as an occasion for making all the party capital possible.

In the course of proceedings, a certain editor had it dragged out of him that in a South American bar he had heard some idle gossip, that he did not dream of believing, connecting another minister's name with the charges. It seems almost incredible that the poor man should have been forced, under threat of imprisonment in the Clock Tower, to divulge the name as that of Winston Churchill, who was duly summoned to attend. The effect has been best described by Mr. Ford Madox Ford, who was a witness of the proceedings. There was a roar like that of a charging bull, and the First Lord, with his hat pressed down over his ears, his features white and distorted with fury, was seen barging aside the people in the doorway:

"If anyone has dared to say that I would do such a damned swinish thing as to buy a share in any filthy company in any way connected with Governmental action . . . if any man has dared . . ."

They murmured soothing things about his admirable record, but to no effect except to bring his fist crashing on the table:

"If I could get my hands on his throat. . . . To say that I could be capable of such infamy!"

This brought Mr. Lloyd George's secretary fluttering to his side with an agitated whisper. But—"I don't care," Winston thundered, "infamy"! \*

It was all too awkward for words, and it is perhaps not surprising that no further irruption from the Admiralty should have been invoked by the Commissioners. But human and honourable though Mr. Churchill's indignation undoubtedly was, the manner of its expression was disquietingly neurotic.

Towards the end of 1913, the position in Ulster had become one of such open menace that it was evident that the time was at hand for patching up some compromise with the Covenanters, that

\* *Return to Yesterday*, p. 367.

should avoid the dreadful necessity of taking the field against their now large and disciplined army, a prospect of which, for all their big words, the ministers were more afraid than anyone in Belfast, since it was they, and not the Protestants, who had been bluffing from the first. With one exception, however—for it was not in the nature of Winston Churchill to be party to a bluff. He was before all things a fighter, and when the other party to a dispute, however good his case, began to move his hand towards his gun—it aroused in him an instinctive desire to get in his own shot first. That desire the statesman in him might hold in control, but the little incident just described shows only too clearly how liable he was to see—and perhaps even to act—red, on a sudden impulse.

No doubt the best thing even now for the Cabinet would have been to declare frankly and boldly what Churchill had all along believed, and what in their hearts they knew, namely, that in no possible circumstances could there be a question of inflicting compulsory Home Rule on the Protestants, and that the only real difficulty concerned not the principle but the boundaries of exclusion. And if Churchill had been Premier, I do not think there can be the least doubt that he would have pronounced the word exclusion loud and bold, and if Dublin had objected or Belfast asked for more, have made it plain to both that what was sauce for the Protestant goose was equally so for the Catholic gander.

But Asquith, with his lawyer's instinct, was not the man to give away any point of his brief before absolutely necessary, and as a practical politician he sought to devise some face-saving formula that would enable him to concede the substance of the Protestant demand, without infuriating his followers and allies by the humiliation of an open surrender. His solution, like that of the Dreadnought controversy, overreached itself by its own ingenuity—it was to allow any Ulster county to vote itself out for six years. Carson at once repudiated the offer with contempt, as that of a death sentence with stay of execution; and as every Liberal and Nationalist organ had proclaimed it as the utmost and final limit of concession, the deadlock appeared more hopeless than ever.

And now the fateful year 1914 had arrived, in which Home Rule would automatically become law. Never had the spirit of faction raged with such unbridled violence; what with Liberal threats to deal with the Covenanters as rebels and traitors, and with Tories, including highly placed soldiers, prepared to tamper with the allegiance of the army, and even mooted a project of practically disbanding it by inducing the Lords to tamper with the annual Army Act.

It is no wonder that, apart from Asquith, the more sober and responsible among the ministers had begun to put out feelers for a settlement; though, while Asquith's offer still remained the official limit, it was not practical politics to come out for the only sort of settlement that would settle anything. Of all these advances,

Churchill's appeared the most hopeful and conciliatory. His fertile mind had for long past been busy with ways and means of achieving peace with honour, and he had mooted one ingenious plan in which Great Britain itself, and by implication Ireland, should be united in a federation of locally self-governing units—Wales, Ulster, Yorkshire, and so forth. That project had split on the solid rock of Catholic resistance; but late in 1913, he had gone further than any other minister by using language that it was hard to interpret as anything else than a guarded offer of exclusion. And it would seem that Lloyd George had even tried privately to move Redmond to see reason by threatening him with Churchill's resignation, as well as those of Grey, Haldane, and himself, to which that shrewd Irishman had objected that such action would be fatal to his fellow Celt's own career—and the proposal dropped.

Nevertheless, the gap between Asquith's offer, and the same thing without the time limit, which Carson had expressed his readiness to consider, was so narrow that it would have seemed that only a little more time and patience were needed to bridge it. Nothing could have appeared less on the cards than that the way of conciliation should have been incontinently abandoned—and that Churchill, of all people, should have decided that the time had come to cut the Ulster knot with the sword, regardless of the consequences.

Nobody, then, was prepared for what happened on the 14th of March, when he went to Bradford, to deliver a thundering Philippic, in which he announced that the Government's offer was positively the last it could or ought to make; and then proceeded to talk about the old battle-ground of English history and the issue fought out on the field of Marston Moor; and lest there should be any possible doubt of his meaning, added that though bloodshed was no doubt lamentable, there were worse things than bloodshed even on an extensive scale. And then, after more in the same hectoring vein, he concluded on the words; "Let us go forward together and put these grave matters to the proof."

Hitler himself could hardly have made it plainer that patience was exhausted, and if words mean anything whatever, it is hard to see of what other interpretation the sewere susceptible. No one in his senses could have doubted how they would be taken in Belfast; especially when words were swiftly followed up by action on land and sea that seemed plainly designed to implement them.

The Third Battle Squadron of the fleet was ordered by the First Lord to Lamlash, within striking distance of Belfast, and orders were meanwhile issued to the Commander-in-Chief in Ireland to send troops to occupy various key points in Ulster, with the ostensible purpose of protecting Government stores of arms and ammunition, but with what, in the light of the Bradford speech, would appear to have had the fairly obvious further intention of rendering hopeless in advance any resistance of the Ulster army.



To a people in arms, this presented an immediate choice between resistance and surrender.

Sir Arthur Paget, the Commander-in-Chief, was a guardsman, of perhaps no more than the average intellectual capacity, and he loathed the business—but orders were orders, and a visit to London only confirmed his impression that the Government were indeed determined to put the matter to the last and sternest proof of all. In a state of horror-stricken bewilderment he prepared to deploy all the forces at his disposal on the line of the Boyne, for the formal invasion of Ulster. At the same time, he had managed to extract some sort of authorization from the easy-going Colonel Seely, now at the War Office, to give officers with conscientious scruples about fighting the Covenanters the choice of resigning their commissions.

The result might have been foreseen, especially as the first officers on whom it was sprung were members of crack cavalry regiments, full-blooded cavaliers of independent income, who set the lead by electing to resign practically in a body—and it soon became evident that the men in Sir Arthur's command were of the same mind, and that neither threats nor persuasion would induce them to march, still less to fight, for what their own commander described as "the dirty swine of politicians", against the King's loyal subjects who only desired to be left in peace under the Union Jack.

Churchill himself may, or may not, have remembered, that the last time the British army had elected to take the bit in its own teeth, was when, under the leadership of his own mighty ancestor, it had refused to fight for a Catholic King against the Protestant hero—as he is still regarded in Ulster—William III. And for that earlier Churchill's cool and calculated betrayal, he himself has made the most eloquent apology that the case admits.

This is not the place to unravel the whole complicated story of what came to be dramatized as the Curragh mutiny, a plain misnomer, since the officers were only exercising a choice deliberately forced upon them. Its consequences might easily have been disastrous. But—with that perverse habit that real life has for evading good morals—the immediate results were almost wholly salutary. The removal of Seely from the War Office can hardly be described as a major disaster, since it unintentionally paved the way for the advent of Kitchener; and perhaps the most untoward feature of the retirement of Sir John French, the destined commander of the British Expeditionary Force, was that it was only temporary. As for the loyalty of the army, that was soon to be gloriously vindicated.

Grave matters had indeed been put to the proof, but with a very different result from any that Churchill could have anticipated. For it had been proved to demonstration that the Government's Home Rule project was dead and damned, as far as it applied to the Protestants.

The Civil War, as Churchill had no doubt hoped, had been nipped in the bud—but the victory was with the Covenanters, and the Government were forced to drink the last dregs of humiliation when, shortly afterwards, a huge consignment of arms was brought by sea, and publicly distributed among the Ulster forces, without the faintest attempt to restrain or punish what Asquith not unplausibly characterized as “a grave and unprecedented outrage”.

The ultimate effect on Ireland of this triumphant demonstration in the technique of armed resistance was indeed deplorable.

It only remains to account for what must surely rank as the least accountable episode in Mr. Churchill's long and varied career. On other occasions we may judge him to have been in the wrong or mistaken, but never with such complete apparent breach of natural continuity. Why, one still asks, should he suddenly have gone off the deep end in this way? Why have flung aside all restraint and sense of responsibility, and chosen the terrible course that was the logical sequel of his Bradford heroics? One can only hazard a guess, that the sheer nerve strain of his tremendous task at the Admiralty, with the grotesquely added burden of his political responsibilities, had temporarily snapped something within him—some faculty of inhibition—and that his naturally combative disposition had erupted with volcanic violence. Or perhaps some day—for he is great enough—he himself will vouchsafe the true explanation.

## 5.

There were no naval manœuvres for the British fleet in the summer of 1914. The Admiralty had come to this decision principally on grounds of economy, for Mr. Churchill was having to fight as hard as his predecessors had ever done for very penny, and more than once he had been on the verge of resignation. Not even Agadir had diverted Mr. Lloyd George from his strenuous efforts to starve the services, and at the beginning of the year he had cheered the hearts of the Liberal back-benchers, not to speak of the German war-lords, by a newspaper article in which he had made a pointed reference to Lord Randolph's stand against the Admiralty. And money was wanted more urgently than ever, not only to maintain a perilously exiguous margin of battleship superiority, but also to finance the costly but needful transition to oil fuel. So it was decided to substitute for the manœuvres a complete, test mobilization of the whole fleet. This decision, if Fisher had taken it, might have ranked as one of the most brilliant in history, for he had divined that in the late summer the Day would be very close at hand. But from Mr. Churchill's own account its timing would appear to have been no more than a lucky chance, and indeed the whole vast armada was,

on Saturday, July 25th, preparing to disperse in the ordinary course of routine.

But by this time events had materialized that only too plainly heralded the breaking of the storm. The day before, Sir Edward Grey had sprung upon a Cabinet, distracted with seeking a way out of its Irish imbroglio, news that the Austrian Government had launched an ultimatum that involved a declaration of war against Serbia, and, as an almost necessary consequence, a collision between the two rival groups of European Powers. Only by somebody backing down—only, that is to say, by a miracle of goodwill and diplomatic finesse—could the still almost unbelievable and supreme catastrophe be averted.

That week-end, Mr. Churchill went down to Cromer, where his wife was unwell, leaving his First Sea Lord, Prince Louis of Battenberg, in charge at the Admiralty. The selection of this German-born and German-married royalty, who looked the perfect image of some black-browed and fierce-bearded mediæval Cæsar, for such a post at such a time, was asking for trouble; but no more happy combination could have been imagined than that between him and his First Lord. Wholly devoted as he was to his adopted country and her navy, he was known for one of the most competent seamen and technicians in the service; one of those men of supreme talent without any claims to brilliancy, who make ideal team-mates for others of authentic but unstable genius. The two appear to have understood, and worked together in the most fruitful harmony.

They were of course in continuous touch over the telephone, and every fresh piece of news that came in made it appear more probable than ever that things were sliding to the abyss with fearful rapidity. Under such circumstances it would have been criminal lunacy—verging on treason—to have permitted the fleet to disband. Blunders, however, equally gross are on historic record, and it is conceivable that some pacifist and “practical” politician, with a subservient First Sea Lord at the Admiralty, might not have woken up to the necessity—and it does not seem that Asquith would have taken the initiative. But such ineptitude would have been unbelievable of men like Churchill and Battenberg, and it is really not of much moment which of them—and it seems to have been Prince Louis—took the first formal step. They perfectly understood each other and the need of the hour.

There could be no mistaking the need for initiative at the Admiralty, since during these critical days the Cabinet were hivering in a woeful state of indecision, which deprived Grey of his only slender chance of inducing Germany to stay her hand by making it perfectly plain to her where Britain stood, and where he himself had committed her in honour to stand by the close liaison that he had promoted between the British and French staffs. But what was probably a majority of the ministers were still clinging to the hope of standing aside and leaving the Germans to do their worst

on the Continent; at the head of these were Lloyd George, and the veteran John Morley—and among them certainly would have been the Churchill of pre-Admiralty days. Not so the present Churchill \* —“very bellicose” as Asquith noted “and demanding instant mobilization”. To his mind there was one over-riding consideration; the fleet must be fully manned and equipped at its action stations when the hour struck, with the goodwill of his colleagues or without it. Accordingly he tactfully concealed from the Cabinet, which might have judged it provocative, the decisive order that sent the fleet secretly, by night, through the Straits of Dover, out into the mists of the North Sea. On the following Sunday, August 2nd, when the news came that Germany had actually declared war on Russia, he took a yet bolder step, in calling out the Naval Reserves, one for which he had no legal authority, and permission for which the Cabinet on the previous day had definitely refused him.

There was, however, one matter in which even he hesitated to take the bit between his teeth. The German battle-cruiser, *Goeben*, was at large in the Mediterranean, shadowed by two of the British *Invincibles*, and threatening the vulnerable sea communications between France and her North African possessions. Even on August 4th, after a twelve hours' ultimatum had actually gone out to Germany, there would, as Prince Louis urged, have been time to sink her before dark. But the Cabinet, still clinging to the idea that war could be made a gentlemanly game, would not hear of such irregularity—they even vetoed the permission to interfere if the great German ship should get in among the French transports and start a holocaust of shortly-to-be allied soldiers! But the *Goeben* had other and even deadlier work on hand, and putting on all speed was lost in the darkness, steaming eastward. If Fisher had been there to back Churchill at the Admiralty, the order might have gone that would have given the Premier another “grave and unprecedented outrage” to deplore—but would have averted Gallipoli.

No blame, however, can attach to Churchill for not having taken so desperate—and still disputable—a course. If ever man had reason for the peace in stress that comes from the sense of duty done, it was he. Whatever else had been found wanting in the hour of crisis, nothing could be charged against the Admiralty. The First Lord, with his First Sea Lord, and the Admiralty staff, had been working with furious energy, providing for everything on a world-wide battle front, and leaving no detail uncared for. He was the one of all those harassed civilians in daily session at Downing Street to feel something like the exultation of battle. When the time came to radiate the signal “go” from the Admiralty wireless, from poor Grey's heart was wrung the terrible cry, “The lamps are going out all over Europe!” “Winston”—again to quote Asquith, “who has got on all his war paint, is longing for a sea fight in the early hours of the morning to result in the sinking of the *Goeben*.” †

\* *Memories and Recollections*, p. 7.

† *Ib.* p. 21.

life-line, but failed to go all out for her destruction; and Admiral Troubridge, who commanded a squadron at the mouth of the Adriatic, and could still have intercepted her, misinterpreted an Admiralty order as prohibitive of his taking any risks whatever, and deliberately declined battle—in which a court-martial, more merciful than that on Admiral Byng, subsequently upheld him. And it is a sound principle in war that when an order for any reason is honestly misinterpreted, it is the fault, in the first place, of him who issues it. Can it be doubted that if Churchill's vision had enabled him to "twig" the real danger from the *Goeben*, and he had succeeded in hurling all available forces at her in such a way as to have overborne every excuse for "stickiness"—if, that is to say, he had summoned up the confidence, or bumptiousness, or whatever you like to call it, to act in this instance as he was blamed for doing in others—a grievous disaster might have been averted?

It is easy to be wise after the event, and ask for miracles; but that one should be tempted to set an impossibly high standard is after all the highest tribute one can pay. And it would be hard to over-praise the vigour and vitality imparted to the Admiralty administration during the three months of the Churchill-Battenberg partnership. It was of course impossible that under the almost wholly untried conditions of modern naval warfare, and with the British navy operating in all the seven seas, mistakes should not have been made or losses incurred. The First Lord was in the unhappy position of having to bear the blame for every defect of judgment on the part of a commander, and yet to be blamed still more for any suspicion of interference. When three old cruisers were torpedoed in the North Sea by the same submarine, two of them having committed chivalrous hara-kari by standing by to rescue the survivors of the first, he was publicly accused of having sent 1,400 men to their death by overriding the judgment of experienced admirals—though as a matter of fact he had taken the initiative in ordering these ships, unhappily too late, to be withdrawn to a post of greater safety. When it got about that a Dreadnought, the *Audacious*, had had the misfortune to strike a mine off the coast of Ireland, there was a similar disposition to blame it on him, as if he could, or ought to have been personally responsible for the movements of every ship.

But for a navy dominating the seas, and therefore continuously offering itself to attack, while its opponents skulked, for the most part, under the protection of their shore defences, the Admiralty was doing its task in a way that afforded little excuse for complaint. The mastery of the North Sea was emphasized by a conspicuously brilliant irruption into the Heligoland Bight, while vast spaces of the ocean were being cleared of the troublesome commerce raiders. There was still the knotty problem presented by Admiral von Spee's China squadron at large in the Pacific, but taking it all round, the British navy had from the start of the war been every whit as much in control of the situation as it had been after Trafalgar. And what more could anyone ask?

But the traditional work of the Admiralty, the ordering of the fleets, was by no means the only call on the First Lord's attention. Not only the changed conditions of modern war, but his own restless genius, were continually impelling him to enlarge the field of his activities. It was among the chief of his personal assets, that he was not prevented by habit or tradition from perpetually striving to be in the van of scientific progress; there was always in him something of the schoolboy's eagerness to be master of the most up-to-date gadget. Hence we need not be surprised to find him among the earliest enthusiasts for aviation, and in fact he had already seized every opportunity he could get of adventuring his life in the primitive planes of pre-war years. At a time when the military Brass Hats, not excepting a certain General Foch, were strenuously belittling those unsoldierly toys on wings, he was throwing all his energy and enthusiasm into the development of the fleet air arm. Moreover, at a time when not only British but German air-mindedness leant towards the development of that aerial white-elephant, the Zeppelin, or dirigible gas bag, he, with a sure intuition, divined that the future lay with the handy and far less vulnerable aeroplane.

As the tide of war swept, accurately to his prediction, over Belgium and across North-Western France to the outskirts of Paris, the slender military air force was fully absorbed, and it fell to the naval air arm to provide not only for the needs of the fleet, but, as he says, "for the air defence of Great Britain when resources were practically non-existent and formidable air attacks imminent"; and he did not shrink from the responsibility. It is extraordinary with what quickness he saw to the heart of the problem. If the Zeppelins were to be prevented from bombing our cities, the essential thing was to deny them air bases, and hence to establish advanced bases of our own on the French side of the Narrows. Here the position was a peculiar one, as the Germans, if they had only chosen to spare the troops, could easily have walked into the Channel ports. As it was, isolated parties of their dreaded Uhlans were riding about the country as if it belonged to them. To call this bluff, and to prevent secret landing grounds being improvised, another military innovation was employed by this adventurous ground force, in the shape of the armoured cars that went scouring along the straight French roads, fully capable of brushing any stray troopers from their path. Provided, that is to say, that the roads themselves could be negotiated; for a road is an easy thing to block by the simple expedient of digging a trench across it. Churchill, however, had his answer for this. In what should surely be a historic minute, he indicated the importance of having each car provided with a contraption of planks that could be lowered in front of it like a drawbridge, over any 10 or 12-foot obstruction. Behold the genesis of the tank!

On the 10th of September, almost that 40th day which he had forecast for the date of the great French recovery, he crossed the Channel to inspect these arrangements, after his manner, on the spot, and this brought him to a place with which his name was destined to be associated more prominently in future years. This was Dunkirk, which, with Calais, constituted one of his two air bases. He noted how lines of defence were constructed on a perimeter of four to six miles radius, how these works could be further strengthened by inundations, and he provided, in case of attack, for the assistance of warships, standing close to the beaches, and firing at a high angle over the sandhills. It was a true strategic instinct that prompted Churchill to provide against the still acute danger of the Germans, baffled on the main front, making a sudden dash at the coast, and might easily have had the effect of making Dunkirk in the earlier the sort of bastion that Tobruk was to be in the later war. But the German commanders were less quick in the imaginative uptake; and their opportunity, such as it was, was let slip.

In fact the War was now entering on a new phase, one from which every spark of imagination was to be eliminated. Just for a moment it had seemed as if it might have been possible to exploit the wonderful victory of the Marne in such a way as to turn the dislocation of the invading armies into a *débâcle*, but no one had an idea of taking any but the most obvious and uninspired course, of prolonging the line of battle by a series of competitive extensions, till it touched the sea, and produced the hopeless deadlock of trench warfare. The only question was—where? For the Germans, thus kindly presented with the chance of getting their second wind, were able to weight their right punch with new reserve formations whose sheer weight of numbers afforded them every prospect of bending back the Allied left, so as to include the coast of Picardy, not to speak of the last inch of Belgium, within their occupied territory. And the advantage in time as well as numbers had now passed to their side; for it seemed as if they had every chance of swinging forward along the coast with irresistible momentum, before the Allies had managed to complete the extension of their own line.

This they proposed to do by transferring the British force, which had been brought to a dead stop by the German trench lines on the Aisne, to take its place on the inside left, the outside being constituted by what was left of the Belgian army. But whether it would be possible to complete the transfer in time, all depended on whether the great fortress of Antwerp, behind whose lines the Belgian field army and King had retired, would be able to attract and hold up the attacking formations for the few necessary days. In the light of pre-war knowledge, hardly anyone would have doubted their ability to

do so for as many months, but now that the great Skoda guns had shown how forts could be smashed like eggshells, the chances for Antwerp and the Channel ports looked black indeed.

On October 2, the worst seemed to have happened. A telegram was received by Grey, at midnight, to the catastrophic effect that the King, with the field army, was about to abandon Antwerp, and withdraw along the coastline while the going was good. It seemed impossible for resistance to be prolonged after that for even the few days necessary to prevent the Germans winning the race for the Channel. Grey's first reaction to the news, even before it was deciphered, was remarkable. Churchill, he knew, had just left by special train for another visit to Dunkirk. A call was instantly dispatched which brought the train to a stop some twenty miles out of London, and thence back to Victoria. Then Grey had gone round to Kitchener's house to bring him out of bed in his dressing-gown, as perturbed as himself, but the two waited, almost in silence, until the First Lord, accompanied by Prince Louis, strode into the room, impetuously proclaiming that the abandonment had got to be stopped, and that he himself was going to stop it. And then as the cautious diplomat vainly tried to cool his ardour, and Kitchener remained silent, as he had been at their first meeting at Omdurman, trying to take it into his slower-moving intelligence, Churchill proceeded to develop his scheme. But how different now were the relations between the ex-Sirdar and the ex-subaltern! Their temperaments were as far apart as ever, but that inherited charm of Winston's had made something like a conquest even of so deep-rooted an aversion as Kitchener's. They had met at Malta in 1912, and found that they could respect and like each other; and now it was Kitchener who was all eagerness to furnish support for the younger man's audacious venture, and who pronounced his opinion in favour of his going. So by half-past one the indefatigable First Lord was back again at Victoria, where his train was still standing at the platform, and soon he was being borne through the night on the way to Dover. -

He arrived at Antwerp at 3 on the following afternoon, and instantly entered into consultation with the Belgian Premier and Commander-in-Chief. If the Belgian troops, almost at their last moral and physical gasp, were to be induced to prolong their resistance, even for a few days, it was imperative for some visible and tangible help from their allies to reach them at once. Kitchener was sending a regular division, but that, with the best will in the world, could not be done in the matter, literally of hours, that was required. But Churchill's fertile ingenuity was equal to the occasion. There was at the time, on the Kentish coast in the neighbourhood of Walmer, a naval division in training. But like so many units in that time of chaotic improvisation, they had not arrived at a stage in which any professional soldier would have considered them fit to take the field against such an enemy as the Germans. Neither the officers nor the men had had time to shake down together or to learn their job, and



besides that, they were short of almost everything in the way of arms and equipment. But they were, in a special sense, Churchill's own troops, and he wired instantly for them to be rushed to the fortress, just as they were. Perhaps nobody but an amateur would have dared think of such an expedient.

But Churchill went further than that. He was on the spot now, determined, come what might, to put the thing through, and to do it if necessary off his own bat. And he wired home a truly amazing proposal, that he should resign his office at the Admiralty and assume command of the whole relieving expedition. This, as Asquith drily noted, would have involved an ex-lieutenant of Hussars taking command of two distinguished major-generals (one of them the subsequent Field Marshal, Sir Henry Rawlinson), not to mention brigadiers, colonels &c.—a plain *reductio ad absurdum*. So it may have appeared to the lawyer statesman, and so it may appear to intelligent critics today—but it is only fair to record that the proposal had the backing of no less a soldier than Kitchener.

Churchill had bargained for the resistance to be prolonged for 10 days. In point of fact it only lasted for six, though it took two extra days after the evacuation for the occupation of the town to be complete. To have held on longer would have been to have invited the cutting off and annihilation of the whole Belgian field army, that was enabled to get away, with the support of the newly landed British division, and to take its place on the left of the line in that prolonged, desperate, almost hopeless struggle, in which the old British regular army was almost wiped out, but in which the thin line of its exhausted survivors remained in the end barring the approaches to the Channel.

An immense amount of ridicule and depreciation was lavished on Mr. Churchill at the time, and has been ever since, for his part in these proceedings. The Naval Division did not succeed in saving Antwerp, or even saving all of itself, since in the course of its retreat over a thousand of the men lost their way in the dark, and spent the remainder of the war in a Dutch internment camp—owing to a nocturnal mistake in the transmission of an order, that no human foresight of the First Lord or anyone else could have anticipated. What had been gained by whipping up our unfortunate allies to prolong a hopeless resistance for a few miserable days? What indeed—except just those few days? And through them, not quite inconceivably, the whole war. For it would appear more than probable that it was just that margin of extra time that enabled the British Expeditionary Force to hold firm, where perhaps any other troops in the world must have been overwhelmed; and if they had failed—if the German rush had surged forward into Picardy, and perhaps beyond—who would dare be sure that the Allies would at long last have snatched victory out of defeat? Even Asquith's rather testy desire for Winston to return now that a capable general was arriving, is followed by the almost reluctant admission, "He has

done good service." He had indeed: better perhaps than the Premier—better than even he himself may quite have realized.

4.

Towards the end of October, the mood of confident exultation with which the War had started was already beginning to wear a little thin. The enormous relief of the Marne was yielding to a sense of anticlimax, when it appeared that the German war machine was functioning as strongly as ever, and that the War was likely to be a very long business indeed. There was, in particular, a disposition to carp at the Admiralty. What was the fleet doing? Why, since the Heligoland Bight affair, had there been no spectacular success? And why these losses and untoward incidents that persisted in recurring? It is the weakest side of democracy that it so seldom knows how to possess its soul in patience. When it fails to get all it wants, it looks about for a scapegoat—usually the wrong one. Having successfully sidetracked the profound abilities of Haldane, from some confused notion that his German training implied pro-German leanings, it was inevitable that popular sentiment should go on to discover an actual, or potential, traitor in the German prince at the Admiralty. A whispering and press campaign was started on precisely the same lines as that against the Prince Consort during the Crimean War, even down to the luscious rumours about the Tower. The dark Battenberger must go! Prince Louis, when this got to his ears, did not hesitate to take what must have been a heart-breaking decision. With uncomplaining patriotism he laid down the office which he had discharged so faithfully. It is not pleasant to record that not the slightest effort was made, by those who should have led popular opinion, to retain and sustain him.

Mr. Churchill had set his heart on a very different successor in Fisher, who, though seventy-four, was as vigorous as ever, and longing to get back into the saddle. That the First Lord would find it beyond his power to harmonize his own spirit with one even more turbulent, does not seem to have struck "my beloved Winston". Their friendship had been an inspiration to him, and Fisher's naturally loyal soul would be bound to him by ties of gratitude. He knew the old fellow's crotchets and tantrums, and did not doubt his own ability to control them. And it was hardly to be wondered at that he should have desired to bring back to the Admiralty the man whom so many had come to regard as the modern Nelson, and to add the force of that demonic energy to his own. United, these might well be deemed irresistible. So long, that is to say, as they could be kept united in a common line of endeavour. And that was asking an immense deal of both their natures. For Fisher was a spoilt child, on the threshold of second childhood. The direction of his energies was, for good or ill, fixed and self-determined—nothing in the world could have diverted it. Any serious attempt to do so

could only result in detonating an explosion of a now extravagantly ungovernable temper. Consequently, there was only one way of working with Fisher, which was to repose absolute faith in the rightness of his intuitions, and to bend all one's powers and all one's might to the accomplishment of his will. And this was the more difficult, since the old autocrat had no idea of confining his infallibility within the bounds of his professional competence. What he willed in any province whatever had got to go through—or he would go himself.

There may have been some people with enough capacity for self-effacement, and almost feminine tact, to have made a success of such a relationship—but the last man in the whole world to do so was Winston Churchill.

Nevertheless in the first stages of their partnership, it seemed as if everything were going swimmingly. The old man was touchingly grateful for Winston's good offices in bringing him to the summit of all his ambition, and both were fully convinced that between them they could infuse such a spirit into the conduct of the navy as to enable it to ensure an Allied victory by its own exertions. They honestly intended, both of them, to go all out to make a success of the partnership, and to honour the gentlemen's agreement between them that neither should take any important step without the consent of the other. And they were in their common element in infusing such ruthless energy into the operations of their departments as to constitute something like an administrative record. Typical of their spirit was the flaming red "*Rush*" label that was freely affixed to their correspondence. Churchill having monopolized the red ink, Fisher annexed the green—and woe to those who failed to respond to the immediacy of either! Red tape was hacked through as if with a giant sword; vested interests were hurled aside, and excuses demolished. The dignified adagio of governmental routine became a breath-taking prestissimo.

The first notable application of the new technique resulted in a success of the very sort for which public opinion had been thirsting. A terrible shock had been administered to national pride, when Admiral von Spee's cruisers, which had been hunted for all over the vast area of the Pacific by British, Japanese, and Australasian squadrons, had at last declared their presence off the coast of Chile by falling on an inferior British force, and sinking its two principal vessels with the Admiral and all hands. That they should ever have had the opportunity of doing this was naturally put down to the blame of the Admiralty, and still is by many critics, though Mr. Churchill's defence is that the Admiral had been ordered to take with him an old battleship, the *Canopus*, whose 12-inch guns, superior to anything mounted by the Germans, would have more than evened the odds. That may or may not have been so, but the Admiral—"mad Cradock" as he was known in the service—was the last man to tie himself by the leg to an old crock incapable of more than a

nautical crawl, while the fast German ships worked their will on a vital British trade route—though it is a mystery why he should have taken with him another old ship, almost equally slow, of no fighting value whatever. However his spirit, unlike that which had declined action with the *Goeben*, was that of the text on his memorial:

"God forbid that I should do this thing and flee away from them: if our time be come, let us die manfully for our brethren, and let us not stain our honour."

But behind this last madness of Cradock's, there had been profound strategic method. He had offered himself like a pawn in a gambit, and no one knew better than von Spee what an opening this had presented to the larger pieces—given the master hand to play them. When his fellow countrymen, in Valparaiso, had graced his triumph with flowers, he had remarked that these would serve for his funeral. He was right—for now the hand of Fisher was upon him. The old Sea Lord had determined to finish him off in style, by a scheme of extraordinary boldness, that involved depriving the Grand Fleet—in spite of Admiral Jellicoe's natural protest—of its exiguous margin of battle-cruiser superiority, and presenting a wonderful opening for the Germans in the North Sea. But the secrecy and swiftness with which only Fisher could have rushed these great ships across the Atlantic conquered all obstacles, conquered even fortune, for everything, including von Spee himself, played accurately into the British hands, and in the icy seas off the Falkland Islands Cradock was richly avenged. So far from joining in the exultant mood of the rest of the nation, Fisher was boiling over with indignation because a small and solitary German cruiser had managed to make a temporary escape from the general holocaust.

It was Fisher's triumph, and no one acknowledged it more generously than his chief of the Admiralty, who frankly confessed that he himself would never have ventured on so overwhelming a concentration—"let us have some more victories together," he wrote, "and confound all our foes abroad and (don't forget) at home," a tribute that the warm-hearted old seaman acknowledged as "Too sweet for words."

The partnership had in this instance functioned perfectly, because Churchill had conceded an absolutely free hand to his First Sea Lord, and, for once, had resigned himself to a supporting role. But who, knowing their two natures, would have dared guarantee the lasting continuance of harmony on such a basis?

The new year opened with an incident fraught with ominous significance. There had been grave searchings of heart at the Admiralty over the prospect of Zeppelin bombing raids on London, against which, in the primitive state of air defence at the time, it appeared impossible to provide an effective counter. But Fisher, in default of a brain-wave, got a brain-storm. Nothing would suffice him but to take hostages from the German nationals in England, and

shoot one in cold blood for every civilian bombed. The idea of this futile Hunnishness naturally revolted Churchill, as it would have any other decent-minded Englishman, and he declined to proceed with it. Whereupon Fisher sat down and dashed off a letter notifying his resignation. This was too much for Churchill, who, annoyed beyond all bearing, replied telling Fisher in effect to mind his own business, and attend to matters within his own professional competence, besides intimating that he did not propose to take his resignation seriously. The snub appears to have had an excellent effect. Late in the day, the old boy had apparently cooled down to normal, and was as friendly as ever—but what hope could there be of permanent understanding with a colleague who was liable at any moment to such incalculable outbursts?

Besides which, it is common experience that in friendship, once there has been open fissure, no amount of patching up will prevent it from re-opening under strain.

## 5.

Of all those responsible for the conduct of the war, Churchill and Fisher were the most completely imbued with the offensive spirit. The three H's of Fisher, "Hit first! Hit hard! and Keep on hitting!" would have done equally well for his colleague. Both believed in a short war and a quick way to victory—the way of genius. That way once found, Fisher's three R's, Ruthless, Relentless, Remorseless, would carry them to the goal.

So far their temperaments afforded the fairest prospect of agreement. But we must remember that one was in the sanguine time of life, and the other at an age that in most men would have been far down in its decline. What else should we expect than that the younger man should have been tempted, in his eagerness, to rush upon any sudden opening that presented itself; while the elder, having marked out the right way in his mind, on a map that was out of date, should have remained fixed in his determination to stick to that and no other?

Follow this clue, and it will be seen that the tragic opposition that was now to develop between them was not the simple case that it is so often represented, of the amateur with a bee in his bonnet overbearing professional wisdom, but was rooted deep in both their natures; and that Fisher's cocked hat may have harboured an older and more dangerous bee than any capable of settling upon Churchill's famous grey topper.

A genius like Fisher's was incapable of confining itself within the limits of his own professional technique. He surveyed the War as a whole, and was as absolute and dogmatic on its political and military as on its naval strategy. He had from the first been profoundly opposed to the prevailing conception, in high circles, of the British army as an integral part of the forces on the Western Front under

the control of the French High Command. His instinct all along was to use it as an independent force, taking full advantage of British sea power, and striking with dislocating effect at whatever point of the enemy seaboard offered the best chance of applying this strategy of indirect approach. He would, instead of allowing the British contingent to be swept back with the French armies across France, have kept it based on the Belgian ports, sticking like an envenomed thorn into the enemy's right flank and distracting his attention. But he had conceived of a far more daring and grandiose application of the same principle, that should strike a mortal blow through the weakest joint of Germany's armour. His mind's eye had lit upon the hard, level stretch of Pomeranian coast, less than 100 miles of easy marching from Berlin. What if an army could be flung ashore on this ideal, and almost undefended landing ground? Not the British army, but the grey legions of the Tsar, who from their Baltic ports, were in such easy striking distance.

Only one thing was needful, and that was to get command of the Baltic. It was here that the British navy would come in. Fisher believed it could be done, and that a fleet could be thrown into the Baltic strong enough to do it.

But if there is one principle in war, whether on land or sea, of practically universal application, it is this; "never allow yourself to enter a bottle unless you have first broken the neck." Now any fleet entering the Baltic would have to force its way through the bottleneck constituted by the Sound and the two Belts. It would then—whatever was left of it after this by no means simple operation—have to be capable of taking on the entire German fleet, which—failing the almost inconceivable operation of permanently blocking the Kiel Canal—could be passed into the Baltic with the greatest of ease. But it would be equally open to that fleet—provided a second British fleet were not there to contain it—to sally Westwards and convoy an invading army over the North Sea, or cut Britain's sea communications. The Baltic force, meanwhile, would have to draw its supplies through that same bottleneck, which, as we now realize only too well, could be sealed up by the simple process of the German army walking into Denmark. And finally, suppose all to have gone well enough for the landing to be duly effected, does anyone now suppose that the ill-armed, ill-found, chaotically staffed Russian hordes (whose movements would almost certainly have been betrayed in advance) would have been anything but cold meat for the overwhelming force that, using its interior lines, the German High Command would certainly have hurled upon it?

If Churchill had been responsible for this precious scheme, would it not have been sufficient to damn him forever as a hare-brained amateur, unfit to be entrusted with vital responsibility? For if ever there were a method calculated not only to risk, but to ensure, overwhelming and irretrievable disaster, it was this. If old Tirpitz had only known, would he not have gone on his knees to thank his

Good Old German God for this spirit that He had put into his rival's heart!

In order to see, in proper perspective, the sequence of tragic events that was to deprive the Admiralty of both Churchill and Fisher, we must never forget this obsessive idea that was always simmering in Fisher's mind, and to which he clove with all the energy of youth and the obstinacy of age. One might have expected him to be invincibly biased against discarding it in favour of an alternative line of approach to the quick victory that both men agreed in seeking.

On the second day of the new year, the British Government received an S.O.S. from the Russian Generalissimo, the Grand Duke Nicholas. The Turks, heartened by the arrival of the *Goeben* at Constantinople, had plunged into the War on the side of Germany, and their armies in the Caucasus were threatening to invade European Russia, a feat of which they were—and soon proved to be—hopelessly incapable. But it seemed impossible, after the loyal way that the Russians had sacrificed themselves to take the pressure off their Allies in the West, to resist the modest request for a demonstration of some kind against the Turks to relieve this pressure in the East.

But the idea was enough to set the First Lord's imagination on fire. It was already well primed; for ever since Turkey had come into the War, he had been revolving the idea of some stroke at what had, from the days of Troy, been a strategic gateway of vital importance, that of the Dardanelles. He had already perceived that the best defence of Egypt against a Turkish advance overland, would have been by an expedition from thence to seize the Gallipoli Peninsula, though the requisite number of troops did not appear to be available at the moment. With more doubtful wisdom he had sanctioned a brief range-finding bombardment of the Turkish forts by ships of the fleet—though even this gross advertisement does not appear to have had the effect that might have been expected in putting the comatose Orientals on the *qui vive*.

But Churchill's imagination did not take fire so quickly and violently as that of Fisher, who, on the very next day after the receipt of the Grand Duke's request, drafted, in one of his violently emphatic letters, a scheme for an expeditionary force to be formed by replacing a great part of the B.E.F. in France by Territorials, and rushing it *via* Marseilles to Besika Bay, while the old battleships of the fleet forced the Narrows, the Greeks seized Gallipoli, and all the Balkan States, including the notoriously hostile Bulgaria, simultaneously and obligingly co-operated—this last a heroic example of what has since come to be known as wishful thinking.

The principle was clear. If the Dardanelles were to be forced, they must also be seized and held on both sides, by a combined naval and military operation, on the grandest scale, ruthlessly pressed home. And one can see now that if either Fisher or Churchill had been in the position of a Führer, with the Allied forces at his

unlimited disposal, the coup would in all human probability have been brought off with the happiest results. But, as Fisher himself reluctantly admitted, it was not to be. "Our Aulic Council will adjourn till the following Thursday fortnight."

It could do little else. For the unity of purpose and command without which there can be no quick way to victory, were wildly inconceivable in the high places of the Allies—they were not to be found even in the British War Council. For the detachment of an expeditionary force for the Dardanelles was a War Office matter, and Kitchener was the last man to be a party to it. He too was growing old, and his mind was incapable of quickening the glacier-like tempo that had always characterized its processes. He was still the engineer, calculating the strains and stresses he would have to overcome, and patiently constructing the vast military machine capable of taking them. Until this more than Herculean labour was accomplished, he was not to be tempted to dissipate his forces in sudden and hazardous improvisations. Besides which, any diversion from the Western Front would have been violently resisted by those exacting and jealous allies, the French—not to speak of the whole British Staff in France from the commander downwards; and Kitchener, who had had his baptism of fire in the French army, was an incurable Gallophile.

It soon became evident that for the present, a military force capable of seizing even one side of the Dardanelles passage was not to be had, and consequently it would have seemed that the demonstration, for which the Grand Duke had asked, was all that was practicable. But so tame a conclusion was antipathetic to a mind like Churchill's. Once he had set his heart on any project he might have said, with Napoleon, "Impossible! Do not let me hear that foolish word!" And that idea of Fisher's of forcing the Narrows with the old crocks of the fleet—did not that suggest a solution? How if the fleet were to go ahead and force the passage alone? It was at any rate worth enquiring into. A telegram was accordingly sent to Admiral Carden, commanding at the Dardanelles, to ask whether this were a practicable operation.

Now here was an utterly different proposition from Fisher's, and one that violated every principle of sound strategy, including that which Fisher himself proposed to defy in his Baltic scheme. For the Dardanelles was another bottleneck through which it was proposed, without knocking it off, to force the fleet. The most fatal result that could possibly have ensued from such an attempt might easily have been its success—the success of a lobster in inserting himself into the lobster-pot! Suppose, by some miracle, a remnant of those old battleships to have succeeded in emerging from the Narrows into the Sea of Marmara—what then? They would have found the *Goeben* waiting for them supported by the whole Turkish fleet, such as it was. And suppose even these to have been somehow disposed of, they could not have taken Constantinople, nor would they, being



British, have laid it in ruins. They might have compelled the Government and Sultan to retire out of harm's way, and made themselves a terrible nuisance; but the Turk, as he was to show later, was not so easily knocked out of a war as all that. Meanwhile the Turks on either shore would have made it their business to cut them off from every means of supply or refuelling, and eventually, like Admiral Duckworth more than a century before, they would have had to run the gauntlet again in order to escape—and with far less chance of succeeding.

But, with the shores in possession of the enemy, was it so certain that they would ever succeed in forcing the Narrows at all? For here another principle, not strategic but tactical, comes into play—ships were never meant to fight forts, unless those manning the forts are so ill-armed or incompetent as to be beneath military contempt, which was very far from being the case with the Turks. No one realized this handicap so well as Fisher himself, who, having been with Admiral Hornby when the fleet had entered the Dardanelles in 1878, knew well the difficulties of the passage.

Looking back on it now, one can say with confidence, that while a successful military and naval stroke at the Dardanelles might have gone far to shorten the war, the idea of forcing them with the fleet alone differed from Fisher's Baltic plan only as partial from total suicide.

But unhappily it had behind it all the driving force of the First Lord's energy and invincible optimism about any scheme on which he had once set his heart. And though perhaps he may not have realized it himself, he was determined to infuse his own confidence into his naval advisers and subordinates, and to drive them forward by the sheer force of his personality. It is a way that has frequently succeeded in achieving the apparently impossible, but unfortunately in real life, in spite even of Napoleon and Churchill, there is such a thing as the really impossible.

It is easy to see by what fatally facile steps he was led on. There was not a single responsible naval man who was incapable of seeing the fundamental unsoundness of an attempt to force the Narrows by the fleet alone, and yet there was not one who would take it on himself to warn the First Lord, in plain English, of the whole, and prohibitive truth about it. The traditions of discipline and loyalty, and above all of silence, in the service, were all against such candour, and for a naval commander to admit the impossibility of any job that he was invited to undertake, might have resulted in his ignominious supersession. It was not Admiral Carden's business to address himself to more than the plain question of whether the Narrows could be forced, and he was only putting the most hopeful face on it when he replied that though they could not be rushed, they might be forced by extended operations—at what cost and with what results it was not his business to say, especially as he had been told that "importance of results would justify severe loss".

Not a single one of the high naval authorities at the Admiralty appears to have been under any illusions about what one of them, Sir Henry Jackson, subsequently characterized as a "mad thing to do", but it is only fair to Mr. Churchill to say that none of them made it his business to formulate his objections. The attitude of old Wilson, who had come back to the Admiralty to help Fisher, is typical: "I never recommended it. I never strongly resisted it, because it was not my business to do so."

But then Wilson's natural reticence bordered on the morbid. It was the very opposite with Fisher, and yet his attitude on the War Council during this critical January was the most baffling of all, as he appears to have convinced himself that it was his business to sit mumchance, rather than give the least hint of dissent from the First Lord's project. It was only towards the end of the month, when preparations were well advanced, that his increasing dislike and distrust of the whole scheme became apparent even to Churchill. It is probable that the old man's silence had been due to a violent conflict that was taking place in the depths of his mind, and that he himself could only wait for the result to define itself by some explosive uprush into consciousness. It came on the 28th, when, after Churchill had been pushing forward his scheme to the War Council with compelling enthusiasm, Fisher silently got up and left the table for the purpose of writing out his resignation. But Kitchener, who was only too pleased to give the fleet a free hand to do what it could without troubling the army, followed him into the next room and exerted all his diplomatic talent, successfully, to bring him back; and after lunch that day Mr. Churchill took the opportunity for a heart-to-heart talk, in which, putting forth the whole of his persuasive charm, he conquered his friend's opposition for the time being. But such conquests are seldom permanent.

The whole world knows the tragic outcome of this confusion of purposes and conflict of personalities. Never was there so plain an instance of the right thing being attempted in the worst possible way. An imposing armada was assembled, including the first of the Dreadnoughts constructed under Churchill's auspices, the *Queen Elizabeth*, on the power of whose 15-inch guns he had built extravagant hopes. But it is only fair to say that he himself would never have consented to action by the fleet alone, except as the bitter alternative to no action at all. He still moved heaven and earth to get military support, even crossing the Channel to plead with French for some concession of troops for this vital object—though he might as well have tried to get blood out of a stone. In the middle of February he really did manage to get the promise of a regular division out of Kitchener, only to find that the great man almost immediately changed his mind or yielded to pressure, and insisted on keeping it at home. So that the naval operation had to go forward alone, first by a series of rather half-hearted bombardments, interrupted by bad weather; and then, after vigorous speeding up from the Ad-

miralty of the unfortunate Carden, who obviously disliked the whole business, and eventually went sick, there came the attempt of his successor, de Robeck, to force the passage, which resulted in no less than a third of the total battleship strength being sunk or put out of action, with nothing to show for it, and the Narrows not even entered.

## 6.

It had been characteristic of the mentality of what Fisher had called the Aulic Council, who were responsible for muddling into, though not through, this Dardanelles imbroglio, that they appear to have comforted themselves with the notion that they could always draw back, if they found they had bitten off more than they could chew, and cut the loss of one or two obsolescent battleships that in any case were due for breaking up. But the limited liability principle is not so easy to apply to the operations of modern war. To have allowed the despised Turk, of all adversaries, to inflict an ignominious repulse upon the mistress of the seas, and to have left it at that, would—as it seems to have dawned on these not too prescient intelligences—have entailed repercussions on Allied prestige throughout the East, and the Balkans, whose effect no man could foresee, and none dared face.

The whole story, which concerns us here only in so far as it concerns Mr. Churchill, is one of such egregious fecklessness and muddle as almost passes belief when set down in cold print. Everything was done too late; and done, not of free purpose, but by the compulsion of events, as some panic-stricken man, in a burning building, refuses to move until his room is actually on fire, and then finds the way of escape, that he might easily have taken at first, wrapped in dense clouds of smoke, through which he must now plunge at his mortal peril. In the Allied councils everybody was pulling against everybody else, and blocking everybody else's plan, and what did eventuate was no intelligible plan at all, but the blind and varying resultant of conflicting purposes. The Russians were cutting their own throats as well as their Allies' by actually refusing to allow Gallipoli to be taken, as it might have been, by the Greeks; the French were ready to go to all lengths to prevent a single British soldier from being diverted from the trench lines in Flanders; among the British commanders an uncompromising opposition was already beginning to develop between Westerners and Easterners; the War Office was pulling against the Admiralty; the naval experts at the Admiralty were more and more coming to be in passive opposition to their civilian head.

After de Robeck's repulse, it soon became evident both to him, and to the sailors at the Admiralty, that the idea of forcing the Straits without military assistance was madness—from Churchill's point of view "a wall of crystal, utterly immovable, had begun to tower up

in the Narrows, and against this wall of inhibition no weapon could be employed". He himself was not in the least daunted, and, if he could have had his way, would have pressed on the attack to the bitter end; but even his will was not capable of driving on his now thoroughly disgruntled team, who were in no doubt that the bottleneck policy was sheer suicide, until the neck itself had been secured by military aid.

And such aid was at last forthcoming. Before the naval attack was launched, even Kitchener had conceded it in principle, though only as a sort of second string in case of failure by the fleet—a commander, Winston's old friend, Sir Ian Hamilton, had been actually appointed. But it was the same monotonous story of "he who will not when he may". What might have been done with ease and economy of effort, if done in time, had, by the time the whole complicated, not to speak of muddled, business of assembling and staffing an army had been accomplished, become a forlorn hope. The essential element of surprise had been lost, and even the Turks had become alive enough to their danger to turn the Peninsula into a fortress. Consequently when, five and a half weeks after the failure of the fleet, the army was at last flung on shore, its most heroic efforts merely succeeded in establishing a precarious lodgment on the tip of the Peninsula, in which it was in far greater danger than the enemy. And thus the authorities, who had grudged a single division when it might, added to the forces already available, have done the business, now found themselves committed to engaging what ultimately amounted to no less than fourteen, in an enterprise that got more and more bloody and hopeless with each successive spasm of attack.

Though the venture had now ceased to be one in which the fleet could play more than a supporting role, Churchill's faith in its soundness remained undimmed; he never ceased to believe that victory, given the unswerving will to conquer, was just round the corner, and he pressed on the naval effort with all the resources at his command. Such is equally the spirit of the hero who snatches victory out of defeat, and of the gambler who plunges from loss into ruin.

But heroism or obstinacy, it was making his position at the Admiralty impossible, and straining his relations with Fisher nearer and nearer to breaking point. For now the First Sea Lord's aversion from the whole business had become as obsessive as the First Lord's enthusiasm. He had been dragged into it against his will, and only on the understanding that it could be broken off before it had gone far enough to weaken the strength of the fleet in the main—North Sea—theatre. And it must be remembered that at the back of his mind there was always his own darling project of an irruption into the Baltic, on which he had set his heart long before there had been any question of going for Constantinople; and to switch over from one basic plan to another had become, at his age, a mental impossibility.

The wonder is not that the break came, but that it was delayed so long. For Fisher, in Churchill's own words, that state the case as fairly as his severest critic could desire, "saw himself becoming ever more deeply involved in an enterprise which he distrusted and disliked. He saw that enterprise quivering on the verge of failure. He saw a civilian minister to whom indeed he was attached by many bonds of friendship, becoming every day a hard and stern taskmaster. . . ."

A hard and stern taskmaster! And Fisher had the world-wide reputation of being incomparably the greatest of living seamen, and had practically the whole weight of naval opinion behind him, on a matter that, in his opinion, was now becoming vital to the safety of the country—that of the draining of British resources from the North Sea. And Churchill's knowledge of naval technique, apart from what he might have picked up during the tenure of his present office, was precisely that of Gilbert's civilian "Ruler of the Queen's Navee".

The fact that Fisher, if he could have got his way, would have committed the fleet and the country to an enterprise even madder than that of forcing the Narrows, did not in any way affect the issue, which was simply whether this most uncompromising of autocrats would allow himself to be hustled and driven, against his will and conscience, as a slave beneath the whip of a civilian taskmaster. And with old age Fisher's life-long self-will had ripened into egomania; as he had already only too plainly showed, to cross him in the slightest way was to detonate an explosion of uncontrollable fury. He had already been on the verge of resigning on the Dardanelles question; he had expressed his opinion of it to the First Lord in three all-comprehensive words—"Damn the Dardanelles!"

What was it then kept him from taking the final plunge from January to the middle of May? Partly, no doubt, it was because this would have involved the bitter collapse of all his dreams and all his ambitions. He never doubted that he was the man who could do for England against the Kaiser all, and more, than Nelson had done against Napoleon. His whole life had been the preparation for this opportunity—and now, to see himself shelved, a foiled old man,

Lost to life and use and name and fame,

was what his resignation would have amounted to! And there was another reason. When he had written "my beloved Winston", it was because the words were literally true. He did love him—nothing could alter that—with all the warmth of a kindred and grateful spirit. So hypnotic was the effect of the younger man's charm, that he was positively afraid of it! He could stand from him far more than he would have from any other mortal. And yet there are limits to all things; and even to Winston, he was incapable of playing Job.

On April 11th, a fortnight before the landing, when the tension

between them had become so extreme that as he himself says, "every officer, every man, every ship, every round of ammunition . . . became a cause of friction, and had to be fought for by me, not only with the First Sea Lord but to a certain extent with his naval colleagues", the First Lord sought to clear the air by a personal appeal: "Seriously, my friend, are you not a little unfair in trying to spite this operation by side winds and small points after having accepted it in principle?" The result was merely to evoke a counter protest, to the effect that never in his whole life had Fisher sacrificed his convictions as he had to please Winston; and this was shortly followed up by an even more ominous note, in which he plainly intimated that he was hovering on the verge of resignation. The breaking point could not be far off, especially as the First Lord showed no signs of relaxing "the great and continuous pressure" which, as he himself frankly acknowledges, he persisted in applying.

The final phase was ushered in by a closely reasoned memorandum, in which Fisher stated with overwhelming force his objections to any renewal of the attempt to penetrate the Narrows before the shores had been occupied, and concluding with a flat refusal under any circumstances to be party to an order to that effect—a memorandum that, on receiving an ambiguous answer, he also forwarded to the Prime Minister. This was on May 11th, and on the 13th, there was a violent scene at an Admiralty conference between Fisher and Kitchener. For Fisher, knowing the *Queen Elizabeth* was bound to be a target for German submarines, had insisted, and prevailed with Churchill, on having her withdrawn from the Dardanelles—by the mercy of Heaven only just in time, since the dummy battleship left to represent her was torpedoed within a fortnight of her departure. But Kitchener was infuriated at what he considered the withdrawal of necessary support from Hamilton, and for once in his life he lost control of himself. But his explosion was nothing to Fisher's, who stormed back at him that she would come home, that she would come home that night, or he would walk out of the Admiralty there and then. Even the formidable "K." seems to have been fairly overawed into subsidence! The direction in which Fisher's mind was working was only too evident. None the less, on the morrow, the First Lord went out of his way to notify Asquith of his own refusal to be bound by Fisher's veto from sanctioning, should the occasion arise, some "great and decisive effort by the fleet".

That same evening, at the end of an outwardly friendly conversation, Churchill renewed the note of complaint—it wasn't fair of Fisher to obstruct the operations, and then, if there was a failure, turn round and say "I told you so." The old man looked at him, as he noted, "in an odd way", and merely remarked, "I think you are right—it isn't fair." No more was said on the subject, and they parted as usual—but the train had been fired.

Next morning, at 9, Churchill's private secretary came hurrying up to him in a state of great agitation, with the news that Fisher

had resigned. The ostensible occasion for this was almost absurdly trivial, a minute dealing with certain minor reinforcements for the Dardanelles, with a covering letter to the effect that any point was open to discussion. But Fisher's naval assistant had at once perceived that if his chief got it, in his present mood, he would consider this meddling initiative in matters of pure naval technique to be the last straw, and therefore he had had the note referred back, with a warning as to the probable consequences. But the First Lord had been adamant—he did not believe Fisher would object, and was in any case determined not to give way. Perhaps he had got so used to Fisher's gesture of resignation that he had ceased to take it seriously.\*

But it was serious this time. Fisher was in a state that, if his sex had been different, would have been described as one of acute hysteria. He was not only resigning, but running away. He had, in his letter of resignation, announced his immediate departure for Scotland, and was only prevented from carrying out his intention by a letter from the Premier ordering him in the King's name to remain at his post, and even this had not the effect of inducing him to re-enter the Admiralty, or transact any business. He was above all determined to avoid contact or interview with the friend who had so often vanquished him before with that compelling charm of his. As it was, a written appeal in the name of their friendship, to reconsider his decision, threw him into a state of such acute distress, that his refusal was couched in emotional language more appropriate to a broken love affair. "*You will remain and I will go—it is better so! Your splendid stand on my behalf I can never forget. . . . I really have worked very hard for you in return—my utmost . . . you know in your heart no one has ever been more faithful to you than I have. . . . I have worked my very hardest.*"

A second appeal wrung from him a cry of agonized pathos:

"Please don't wish to see me, I could say nothing as I am determined not to. *I know I am doing right.*"

Not only the most charitable, but the only interpretation that can be placed on his proceedings during the week that elapsed between his letter of resignation and his final departure, was that the prolonged nerve-strain and frustration of the past few months had been too much for his aged brain-cells, since his conduct was neither that of a patriotic nor an entirely sane man. Even when a decisive naval battle appeared imminent, and the Admiralty was without a First Sea Lord, he remained invincibly sulking like Achilles in his tent; and he ended up by drafting an ultimatum to Asquith in terms of such megalomaniac arrogance as to render it plainly unthinkable for him to be trusted in any responsible post either then or in the future. It was a tragic conclusion to so splendid a career.

\* *Lord Fisher*, by Admiral Sir R. H. Bacon, Vol. II, pp. 254-5.

Mr. Churchill was under no illusion about the grave effect that his First Sea Lord's resignation was bound to have on his own personal and political fortunes. But it is doubtful whether he had the least idea of the full force of the storm to which it would expose him. He had certainly no thought of quitting his post at the Admiralty, nor did it seem as if he would fail to have the steady support of the Premier or—what mattered even more—any difficulty in reconstituting his Board. The other Sea Lords were certainly in general sympathy with Fisher, but they were not prepared to carry it to the point of their own resignation. And at this juncture, a great and unexpected supporter presented himself in the shape of old "Tug" Wilson, who, in spite of the fact that Mr. Churchill's advent to the Admiralty had cut short his own tenure of office there, and that ever since his return there had never been any sort of intimate relations between them, now in his quiet way consented to step into Fisher's vacant office, and thus to give to the new team the prestige of a naval reputation only second to Fisher's own. And the silent, selfless, old sea dog was soon to follow this up by making it clear that he was not prepared to take office under any other First Lord. Though with the characteristic dourness that justified his alternative nickname of "Old 'Ard-'Eart", he was at some pains to make it clear that this sprang from no personal regard, it may perhaps rank as the highest of all the innumerable compliments of which, at one time or another, Mr. Churchill has been the recipient.

But even this powerful support was to prove of no more avail than that of the King's horses and men to Humpty Dumpty. For Fisher's reputation with the public was hardly second to that of Kitchener himself, and his fall had the effect of precipitating a major political crisis. Popular sentiment was, in fact, in a dangerously inflamed mood, for everywhere the war seemed to be going badly, and there was not only the gross failure of Gallipoli, but also a rising indignation sedulously worked up in the press, about the way in which the soldiers of what was now a people's army on the Western Front, were being sacrificed by the failure of the home authorities to supply them with munitions. The tendency to blame these things on the Government would have been in any case strong, but since it was not a national but a party government, the temptation to make political capital out of them was hardly to be resisted.

Not that the man in the street, or even Members of Parliament, were to be blamed for wishing to end so monstrous an arrangement as that which commits the conduct of the nation's affairs, when it is fighting for its existence, to the nominees of one particular faction. Even the crudest sort of patriotism would, one might have imagined, have required the sinking of party differences for "duration", in one common and sacred purpose. And indeed this was precisely the standpoint of Churchill himself. During the crisis that had



preceded the War, when the pacifists and appeasers had seemed likely to prevail in the Cabinet, he had wanted to see a government of national concentration, and had even put out feelers for this purpose to the Opposition leaders, through his friend, F. E. Smith. And though that evil thing, "practical politics", had been prohibitive at the time, he had, to all intents and purposes, since the beginning of the War, shaken the dirt of it from off his feet, and applied himself with single-minded devotion to the business of his office.

But if he had forgotten politics, politics had not forgotten him. And indeed, what to some people must constitute the most depressing part of the war story is not that of the horror and agony at the front, but of the failure of people behind the lines and behind the scenes to know the hour of their visitation, or turn war to the only profit that can ever come of it—which is by the rebirth of a nation's soul in the unity of a common sacrifice. Such books of intimate revelation as Lord Beaverbrook's *Politicians and the War*, show how thin was the veneer of war-time patriotism over the rancours and rivalries of the normal political game. And the part that Churchill himself had played in this ignoble contest up to the very verge of the War, had been enough to focus on him the peculiar detestation, not so much of the Unionist leaders, who understood what conscious humbug most of it was, but among the party rank and file, who took it all at its face value.

To these simple souls Churchill was merely playing true to his peace-time form, and it was the same blind recklessness that had driven French from the War Office that had now deprived the Admiralty of Fisher, who happened to be specially idolized in Tory circles. It would have been too much to expect of them to suspend judgment in such a case. Arthur Balfour indeed, who had suffered so cruelly in the past from the whips and scorpions of Churchill's tongue, was the first from whom he sought, and obtained, sympathy; and was frankly shocked at the way Fisher had behaved. But Bonar Law, who had been chosen to supplant Balfour because he was presumed to represent the lowest-browed average intelligence of his followers, was as incapable of appreciating Churchill's erratic brilliance, as Churchill the plodding and pedestrian worthiness of Bonar Law.

It was Bonar Law who seized the occasion of Fisher's resignation to present what was practically an ultimatum to Asquith demanding Unionist participation in the Government. This was clinched by the intervention of Lloyd George, who forced Asquith's hand by threatening to resign himself, thus rendering practically certain his own eventual succession to the Premiership, since the share out of offices between the two parties could only produce an unstable mixture, that Asquith was the last man to be capable of fusing into a genuine national, or an efficient war government.

In such an arrangement in which each side is concerned to drive the best possible bargain for itself, Churchill, as the Liberal minister

most obnoxious to Unionist prejudice, was bound to fare badly. His continuance at the Admiralty was impossible, and though Asquith, prompted by Lloyd George, offered him the Colonial Office, even this proved too much for the Unionists to stomach. There were a few brief hours when it seemed as if all might be gloriously recovered; the news came that the High Seas Fleet was out, and Churchill, forgetting politics, was able to enjoy a final spell of glorious life at the Admiralty, where, deprived of his First Sea Lord, he engaged himself in rushing up every available ship to take part in the new Trafalgar, that would more than retrieve his failing credit. But what must have been his disappointment when it proved that the enemy had funk'd it, and scuttled to port in the nick of time! He must now bear the brunt, and resign himself to the almost contemptuous offer of a sinecure post which, however, would carry with it a seat in the Cabinet and War Council.

This he rightly and honourably decided to accept, since it would give him an opportunity of infusing all the vigour and determination he could impart into the conduct of the Dardanelles venture. He still retained his faith in it, still believed that it could be carried through to victory—and he felt his responsibility, as its chief promoter, for seeing it through as far as in him lay.

None the less, it was a stunning blow, the more so as it was entirely unexpected. It seems that, absorbed as he was in the work of his department, he had lost touch with the political animosities and vendettas that he assumed had died in others as they had died in him. He was even naïve enough to appeal to Bonar Law for a fair judgment on his record; the reply was curt and repellent. Lord Beaverbrook, who was much in his company at this time, speaks of him as desiring to retain the Admiralty as though the salvation of England depended on it—"a lost soul, yet full of flashes of wit and humour". The expression "grim and gay" had not then been coined.

But it must have been a high consolation to him to have retained, as he did, in his eclipse, the undiminished confidence and respect of those whose opinion he had most cause to value, those even who had been most opposed to him in the past. Sir John French wrote from France to assure him of his deep affection and admiration; and the grim Kitchener, in the spirit of a great gentleman, honoured him with a special visit of ceremony. "One thing", he said, "they cannot take from you. The fleet was ready." Add to these names those of Wilson and Balfour, and it will be seen that whatever his detractors may have alleged against Mr. Churchill, the few who were on his side towered far, in intellectual stature, above the many who were against him.

## 8.

It would have taken more than the cloud under which Mr. Churchill had fallen to depress his spirits for very long, or to turn

him from the pursuit of his vision. He had no time to waste over vain regrets or recriminations. He had still his place next to Kitchenier at the Cabinet board, and he was also a member of the reconstituted War Council, or, as it came to be known, the Dardanelles Committee. The fact that he had no longer some twelve hours odd of Admiralty business to get through during the day only left his brain more free to create. He was teeming with ideas, and embodied them in a succession of notes and memoranda that form a masterly commentary on the situation even today. He had thus early set his face against the bull-headed and beef-witted strategy of frontal assault on the German trench lines in the West, that wasted the blood and resources of the Allies at a far greater rate than that imposed on the enemy; and whether he was right or wrong in the alternatives he advocated, he at least refused to admit the bankruptcy of imagination, or to regard mechanized war as a competition in bleeding to death.

He had above all made it his special concern to keep his colleagues up to the mark in this Dardanelles business. It was no longer a question as to whether it had been right or wrong in the beginning; they were fairly committed to it now, and it was doubtful whether they could withdraw if they would. They—and he most of all who had been so largely responsible for sending them—owed it to those hard-pressed men in the Peninsula to support them with all the resources available, and above all with the minimum of delay. He had not the least doubt, even now, that given the will and the skill, the way to victory was open. And it would seem overwhelmingly probable that if the matter had rested with him, even after the failure of the fleet, Gallipoli would have fallen long before the end of the summer.

But the division and indecision that had thrown away chance after chance, got worse instead of better as time went on. A war run by committees is bad enough, but when the committee is virtually suspended for three weeks' governmental reconstruction, it becomes suicidal imbecility. Thus while the defence was feverishly strengthening itself, the requirements of practical politics were allowed to hold up the attack; the reinforcements that should have been rushed out arrived at a leisurely trickle, and what should have been the decisive attack was launched at least a month later than it need have been. Even so, a complete surprise was achieved, and the powerful new forces thrown ashore on the Turkish right rear, at Suvla Bay, had only to go forward a few miles to occupy the vital and practically undefended range of hills that would have given them command of the Narrows. But the General in local command, an amiable and infirm dug-out guardsman, remained comfortably ensconced in a boat off the shore for two days, while his men had a delightful time bathing in the wine-dark waters of the *Ægean*. "Everything", he said, "is quite all right and is going well." Meanwhile a certain Colonel Mustapha Kemal was racing up the Turkish reserves from thirty miles away, so that when it at last occurred to the worthy

upholder of the Buller tradition—for Sir Frederick Stopford had last seen service as his military secretary—to order an advance on the no longer unoccupied hills, it resulted in a bigger and bloodier Colenso.

After this it was evident that the British army was pinned fast to the beaches, and that the most that it could hope for, even if competently led, was to get away with the minimum of loss. But even now Mr. Churchill's invincible will to conquer was not broken. If the army was stopped, there was still the old idea of forcing the Narrows with the fleet, and now one of the most dashing of the younger commanders, Commodore Roger Keyes, had an entirely new plan that he believed would bring it off, and he was ready to put it to the proof by himself leading the forlorn hope through the Turkish minefields. But it is not to be wondered at that there was nobody on the Council at home who would have anything to do with so heroic a gamble, a rejection which, as Mr. Churchill says, filled him with despair, and convinced even him that there was nothing for it now but evacuation.

But by this time even the measure of responsibility he had enjoyed as member of the Council had passed from him. For at the beginning of November that body was reconstituted, and Churchill was dropped out in the process; scurvy treatment to be meted out to one who had played a thankless part not only with conspicuous ability, but also with exemplary correctness. He had still his seat in the Cabinet and his Chancellorship of the Duchy of Lancaster, but these would have left him on the shelf, without power, and almost without employment. The wheel of his fortune had turned almost a complete revolution since that time, little more than a year ago, when he had stood in the nation's eye as the inspired young War Minister, a very symbol of national confidence.

It is at such times that a man's true nature stands revealed. Let us try to put ourselves in his place at this crisis, and consider how one of ordinary clay might have reacted to it. He might easily have developed a grievance, and devoted the whole of his energies to righting his own wrong—the most fatal course of all. Or he might have dug his toes into his present office, and devoted all his powers of management and intrigue to establishing fresh political connections, and engineering a come-back, not perhaps to the Admiralty, but to some other equally high office. Or he might even have reflected that the billet of a minister without portfolio was what a man at the front would have enviously characterized as about the cushiest of the many behind the front, and one that he could continue to fill without the faintest disposition on anyone's part to hand him a white feather.

Anyone, that is to say, except himself. For it was not in Winston Churchill to avail himself of even the most plausible excuse to be eating his head off in impotent safety, when he might be up and doing. He had been a fighter from his childhood up, and the experience of falling, in the literal as well as the metaphorical sense, was no new

one to him. His spirit had always been that of Christian in conflict with Apollyon—"Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise." Given such a spirit, the experience and shock of failure is a gift of the gods to heroes. It is a spur to the readjustment of character, the fresh start on a higher plane, that success postpones indefinitely.

If the German fleet had accepted battle, he might no doubt have continued his tenure of the Admiralty in a blaze of glory. But it may be doubted whether the Churchill of a darker hour than any that Britain was to know in the First World War, would ever have materialized.

Whatever judgment history may pass on his proceedings in the time of his ascendancy, it will be hard to find food for censure in his reaction to failure. He had done his duty, as he conceived it, to the men at Gallipoli; now he could no longer be of service to them, he was free to forsake the line of least for that of greatest resistance, even if it meant—as it probably did—leaving his bones on some shell-scarred field of France or Flanders. For a moment he seems to have toyed with another of his grandiose schemes, and suggested his appointment to the Governor-Generalship and military command in East Africa, but though Bonar Law incongruously backed this suggestion, it was soon turned down.\* But no one could deny the reasonableness of a claim to serve in the rank that he already held in the Yeomanry, that of major. He had after all more knowledge and experience of practical war than almost any other holder of that rank. So it was good-bye for the time, if not forever, to practical politics, and he was posted to a grenadier battalion at the front in order to learn the routine, and qualify himself for higher command. A precipitous and most salutary descent for the taskmaster of Fisher, and the autocrat who had knocked over admirals like ninepins! And the proud guardsmen, to most of whom the name of Winston had long been a symbol of demagogic arrogance, were likely to lose no opportunity of putting him in his place.

The Valley of Humiliation lies on the route to the Celestial City, nor has it ever yet been by-passed. But humiliation, as Nebuchadnezzar is said to have remarked about a grass diet, though wholesome, is not good. His friend Lord Beaverbrook speaks of him at this time as depressed beyond the limits of description, and has described the tragi-comic spectacle of his whole household and family plunged into the blackest despair on his departure for the front—his faithful secretary weeping, his mother distraught upstairs, only Mrs. Churchill, as always, calm and helpful.

9.

It is curious that Major—or as he soon became—Colonel Churchill's service in the greatest of all wars, should have been less ex-

\* Lord Beaverbrook, *Politicians and the War 1914-1916*, Vol. II, p. 123.

citing and adventurous than in any of his previous campaigns. The life on the Western Front has been somewhere defined as one of boredom, interspersed with moments of extreme danger, and it was his fate that extreme danger never came his way, except quite casually, and, as it were, by accident. For that God who, as he had some plausible reason for believing, had a special care of his destinies, He who had taken away his pistol before the encounter with Louis Botha, and guided him to the Englishman's house in the midst of the Transvaal, intervened once again on his behalf. It must have been the hardest of his trials, when on probation, that he was at the mercy not only of martinets with a power complex, but of bores. And of this latter breed, one may suspect, was the corps commander whom nothing would suffice but to have a personal interview with the famous Winston, and who ordered him to proceed, at considerable peril to his life, to a certain rendezvous, where a car would be awaiting him, which, when he duly arrived on the spot, turned out to have gone to some other place. One can dimly imagine what sort of an explosion it must have produced when a staff officer at last turned up to break to the ex-minister that, this being so, he could now make the best of his perilous way back to his dug-out. So, however, it had to be, and the journey was safely accomplished. But there was no dug-out at the end of it, for this, during his absence, had been well and truly demolished by a German shell. No wonder he should record his strong sensation of a hand stretched out to save him. "Though whether", he adds, with characteristic whimsicality, "it was General —'s hand or not, I cannot tell."

His probation duly accomplished, Churchill was due for an independent command. French, whose right it was as Commander-in-Chief, offered him the choice between a high staff appointment and the command of a Brigade, and he chose the Brigade. But French was incautious enough to disclose his intention to the Premier. Now Asquith, throughout their long ministerial association, had always apparently been Churchill's staunchest ally and supporter—but the practical politician in him could not fail to take alarm at what might have given colour to a charge of favouritism towards an ex-colleague, whose stock of popularity had fallen so low. He therefore very prudently set himself to torpedo the appointment. And French, who himself was thoroughly out of favour, and on the verge of being kicked upstairs into the Home Command and a Viscountcy, was in no position to oppose him.\*

So it was a battalion, and not a very distinguished one at that—a newly raised Scottish formation, deficient in numbers and even more so in training. But Churchill did not complain; for he rejoiced as greatly as any saint of Cromwell's at the prospect of getting into contact with the enemy, in however humble a capacity. Their trenches were in front of the famous Plug Street, nor had the new C.O. been long installed in his headquarters than the room in which he had

\* *Ib.* Vol. II, p. 75.

been sitting was hit by a shell, just after he had gone out of it. But this was too common a sort of experience for him, or indeed for anyone in the Ypres salient, to bother about. It was quiet, as things went, on the Flanders front, and it was boredom, not danger, that predominated during the tenure of his appointment. Not that this could be charged at his door, for he was indefatigable in his efforts to impart the greatest possible element of liveliness, not to speak of danger, to the proceedings. He had, even before he arrived, supplied the Commander-in-Chief, by request, with a memorandum suggesting various ingenious and offensive tactical devices, and he was one of those people who can never rest until they have put their ideas into practice. So instead of encouraging a gentleman's agreement with Jerry to live and let live, he was always stirring up trouble with the trenches opposite—not too popular a habit in a commander. But he always sought the greatest danger in his own person, and he is said on one occasion, when things were more than usually lively, to have put to a by no means enthusiastic private practically the same question he had asked his sergeant at Omdurman—"Don't you like war?" There is no doubt what his own answer would have been.

But the humdrum routine of a battalion command was palpably too narrow to hold him. And he was no Lawrence-Shaw, to perform austere miracles of self-effacement. All the most prominent people who visited the front seemed to gravitate to his quarters; and in March, 1916, he got leave to come over for the debate on the naval estimates, where he was at the top of his form, and ended up with one of those great chivalrous gestures that only he could have made, demanding the return of Fisher to ginger up the Admiralty. Shortly after this he heard that his weak battalion was about to be merged into another, and in May he was back again in England, this time permanently, since he had resolved not to seek another command, but to return to Parliamentary life. That was fortunate, since if he had remained, he would in all probability have been immolated, like so many others, in the blind butchery of the Somme.

It was assuredly no lack of courage that determined his choice. But it would have been more quixotic than patriotic, to have insisted on confining his great abilities to a task in which they could find so little scope. The war situation was slipping more and more out of Asquith's powerless hands, and as Churchill himself put it, "the feeling of knowledge and power to help in mending matters . . . is strong within me".\* But perhaps—though this is only conjecture—that sense of guidance from a higher source, which, as we know, was also strong within him, apprised him that he was not *meant* to go on in this particular line.

\* *Ib.* Vol. II, p. 75.

Now he was back again in the House, but in a worse case, apparently, than before he had left it for the front; for he was without official standing of any kind—a free-lance private Member, without party connections, and under a cloud of depreciation that showed no signs of lifting. He had touched the rock bottom of his fortunes—certainly in his own opinion, for his sanguine and mercurial temperament was capable of depths of depression commensurate with the heights of its far more frequent exaltation. “He always”, Lord Beaverbrook says, “showed signs of despair in certain circumstances.” Lord Riddell, that invaluable Boswell to Mr. Lloyd George, reports him as saying, “My life is finished. I only care about the war, and I am banished from the scene of action,” and looking back on this period, he has recorded how he felt a sentence of continued indefinite activity almost unendurable—“torture” is the word he uses in another place.

It is in such times that a baffled and thwarted superabundance of energy is liable to turn statesmen factious and patriots disloyal. But this astounding being—and the word is assuredly no overstatement—had his own unique way of providing a safety-valve.

“At a moment”, he says, “when every fibre of my being was inflamed to action, I was forced to remain a spectator . . . then it was that the muse of painting came to my rescue, out of charity and out of chivalry, because she had nothing to do with me.”

For a Frederick the Great to have found solace in the hour of defeat by writing execrable verse, or Fox to have gone home to bury himself in Euripides after gambling away his fortune, was after all only reversion to habit; but Churchill was getting on in the 'forties, and knew even less about painting than he had known about ships on coming to the Admiralty—but he was a man of his hands, and the word impossible was not in his vocabulary. He started—incurable Peter Pan as he was—messing about with some children's paints one week-end, and this so excited his imagination that he promptly ordered a complete outfit of oils, and started attacking the canvas as if it had been another Gallipoli. “Anyone could see it could not hit back . . . I seized the largest brush and fell upon my victim with Berserk fury. I have never felt any awe of a canvas since.”

He thought of painting, as he thought of everything else, in the light of a campaign—his two artistic canons he defined as making a good plan for the army, and keeping a strong reserve. But it was a lightning and most successful campaign; for he quickly developed into a painter not only of competence but, for an amateur, of distinction; and—what is also characteristic of him—greedily receptive of the most advanced ideas and methods of the French impressionist and post-impressionist masters. And who can tell



what steadying and restraining influence this service of the muse may not have had in this most critical phase of his career? For him the hardest of all games to play was a waiting game.

Play it, however, he did, with exemplary discretion. So long as Asquith's Government held together, his part was that of an independent, though creative, one-man opposition, constantly striving to infuse vigour into its clumsy operations, and reasserting himself as a power of undiminished Parliamentary strength. But towards the end of the year it was becoming evident that the days of the Government were numbered. It had never shaken down into a team, and Asquith, essentially a party man, was like a counsel who has been briefed for the other side as well as his own, and has to take on his opponent as his junior. The manœuvre by which Mr. Lloyd George had precipitated the Coalition had effectively unstuck him—it only wanted a timely shove to send him crashing. And early in November, Lloyd George, who had convinced the country, no less than himself, that he was the one man with enough energy and vision to get the war machine out of the ruts in which it had stuck, decided that the time had come. And so Mr. Asquith left Downing Street, never to return, and with him went practically the whole body of his Liberal colleagues in the ministry, who—such was the amazing state of mind engendered by the political atmosphere—considered themselves debarred, in loyalty to leader and party, from serving their King and country—if asked—under the new Premier.

It seemed extremely doubtful whether Lloyd George would be able to form a ministry to back him in his policy of total concentration on winning the war, and he had to employ every sort of shift and concession in order to enlist a sufficient number of notables, mainly of the Unionist persuasion, to give him the support of a working majority. Accordingly he was in no position to pick and choose his team with a sole regard to efficiency; had he been so, there is no doubt that Churchill, of whose abilities no one was more conscious, would have been almost his first choice. But that at the moment was not "practical politics". Even if he could have overcome the Tory prejudice against him, there was a mightier veto on his appointment, that of the great newspaper magnate, Lord Northcliffe. This nobleman, having weighed Churchill in the balances and discovered him to be a failure, was ready to put down a barrage of all his megaphones to prevent his entry into the Cabinet. And Lloyd George was not prepared to push his desire for Winston to the point of imperilling his ministry. Accordingly he sent him a message, through the faithful Riddell, to the effect that he would do what he could for him when he could; and Churchill, faced with this new and bitter disappointment, replied reserving his freedom of action, but added that his only purpose being to defeat the Hun, he would subordinate his own feelings in order to be of any assistance. It is possible, however, that his

canvas may have had to sustain a brush krieg of more than common vigour.

But whatever his private feelings, he preserved the admirable restraint and dignity that had marked his conduct ever since his fall. And in the following July he had his reward. Lloyd George at last saw the way clear to bring him into the Government as Minister of Munitions. Even now it was a step that required considerable courage; though Northcliffe, who was away in America, had lost interest in the anti-Winston stunt, and Bonar Law was mollified. But the Conservative Associations in the country, and a weighty section of the party both in the House and the Ministry, were rabid and vocal in their indignation; there were dark hints of resignations and even of the fall of the Government—but it all frothed harmlessly over, and once he had fairly got down to the job, was soon forgotten.

It is perhaps worth mentioning that at this time, when all his energies were demanded for mastering the vast and complicated business of his new department, he was forced to enact the grotesque, not to say scandalous, farce of a by-election at Dundee. The result, of course, was a foregone conclusion.

## II.

Churchill's preference for the Ministry of Munitions—for he might have had that of the Air if he had chosen—is remarkable, when we consider what an attraction, in the past, the limelight had had for him. His career at the Admiralty had been nothing if not dramatic from start to finish; even his fall had been as magnificent as that of Wolsey. Yet this new post he had chosen was the one of all others that afforded the least scope for publicity. But it was one in which he was able to make a larger contribution than any other departmental chief towards the winning of the War, and, as it proved, to find the happiest scope for his constructive genius.

For to talk of him merely as a fighter is to miss half the truth about him, and the better half. He was equally a worker; his delight had ever been not in destroying, but in making things. He was never so happy as in daubing a canvas, or even, like Balbus, building a wall. Just at this time he had taken a house near Lingfield, and in addition to his other activities, had thrown himself with the greatest zest into the business of planting potatoes. His was the spirit of Siva, who destroys to create; or of the physician who plies the knife to save the patient. Here he had the control of a colossal, improvised organization, in which all the resources and ingenuity of scientific progress were harnessed and combined together, as never before, to one end—the saving of human civilization by cutting out the cancer that was proliferating in its vitals. That it should have come to this was no fault of his; he must take the case as he found it and act without remorse. Certainly he was nothing loath; for

him there would be no more talk about life being finished. He was again on the ascendant of fortune's wheel.

But not where he had been on its last rise. That wheel does not spin round, but rolls forward. It may not have been a sadder, but it was certainly a chastened, and perhaps a wiser spirit, that he brought to his new task, than that of the young bull in the Admiralty china shop. There is no diminution of vigour in his minutes and suggestions, but there is a new note, almost of diffidence, to be observed; "I am not an inventor or designer," is his modest admission, "I have no means of testing or elaborating these ideas." \* After five months' experience he is able to record how, after studying them with the greatest attention, he has passed, almost unaltered, each one of his Council Committee's reports, seeing the decision "which I know is ever so much better than I could have produced myself, if I had studied it for two whole days".

But though there was no question of knocking over, like admirals or ninepins, all or any of the extremely able business men who were the heads of his sub-departments, it did not follow that there was going to be less scope for his driving energy in his new than in his old sphere of usefulness. The first thing that he undertook was a drastic and most salutary reorganization and regrouping of a system, that having improvised itself as it went along, was hardly fit to be called a system at all, and consequently threatened to overwhelm him beneath an intolerable burden of detail. The fifty separate sub-departments were swiftly converted into ten groups, each under the practically unfettered control of an experienced head; and these heads in turn were grouped into a Council answering to that at the War Office or the Admiralty Board.

This simplification and the free hand that he accorded to his group chiefs in the detail of their responsibilities, had the effect of eliminating friction, and of setting him free to employ his own special and unique talents to the maximum advantage. Now that he was no longer the remorseless taskmaster he had been at the Admiralty, now that he no longer itched to have a finger in every departmental pie, he was able to infuse his drive and energy into the whole immense work of supplying the sinews of war; to inspire it through all its ramifications with his own creative enthusiasm, and to co-ordinate its functions so as to provide that every unit of energy, and every ounce of material, should be devoted in the most effective possible way to the achievement of victory.

The pursuit of this last endeavour brought him, ironically enough, back to something faintly reminiscent of the now almost forgotten conflict with the Admiralty of his first ministerial days. For the principle that the fleet must come first in everything, which nobody had upheld more staunchly than himself, had now been pushed to such extravagant lengths as to make the navy a sort of cuckoo in the nest; and it is odd to find Mr. Churchill, of all people, producing

\* *The World Crisis*, Vol. IV, p. 303.

statistics to show that this was really a little extreme when, thanks to the intervention of the U.S.A., the Allies were easily able to muster two separate fleets each fully capable of sending the whole of the Kaiser's armada, should it ever dare come out of its harbours, to the bottom.

It is impossible here to give any idea of the vast extent and diversity of the problems that were hourly crowding in upon his ministry, or of his unfailing capacity for switching over his mind from one to another, always with illuminating or invigorating effect. Their critical importance, and sometimes, even, their very existence, was hidden from the public at home, who thought of the war in terms of the little flags that they were accustomed to stick into their maps to mark the ground gained or lost by the opposing armies. Who, for instance, realized that the shell plants constructed with such pains and forethought in Canada, were having to be broken up as soon as completed, because England was unable to find the dollars to purchase their output? That Britain had not only to meet the demands of her own armies in the field, but that she had to divert a steady stream of munitions to satisfy those of her allies? That to keep up the supply of metal for the army meant cutting down that of food for her already pinched civilian population? And that all these conflicting and urgent claims had to be weighed and adjusted with the most anxious care, and the choice made as between necessary evils, with the sole and unflinching regard to ultimate victory?

The hunger for metal, and the need to lighten, by every means, the strain on Britain's depleted shipping resources, led him to explore—not for the last time—the supplies of iron and steel available in the country itself; park and area railings (those of Hyde Park alone, he suggested, were good for 20,000 tons), girders of unfinished buildings, and so forth. This was typical of the sort of suggestion with which he was continually plying his experts, with a view to "definite recommendations for immediate action". Such stimulus kept things continually humming throughout the whole sphere of activities controlled by his ministry.

He had need too of moral courage, of the highest order; since the making of munitions demands not only the efficient working of machinery, but also of a great army of human labour. And stoutly though Labour had, on the whole, done its part, it would be idle to pretend that there was anything like the same disciplined and total concentration on victory in the workshops that there was in the trenches. And in 1918, partly through overstrain, but partly also through deliberately subversive agitation, there was an epidemic of strikes that seriously imperilled the national war effort, when the balance was trembling between victory and defeat. It was a situation demanding both firmness, and also the utmost delicacy of handling; but Churchill did not hesitate to pluck the nettle, and to make it clear that any man liable to conscription who refused, on any plea,

to serve in the factories, would have to do so in the ranks. But he announced this in a notice in which he appealed, with his most compelling eloquence, to the British workman's sense of fair play—his case was, and proved, irresistible, and the particular strike in which he had intervened promptly collapsed. It may be worth recording that this was in the factories making aeroplane parts at what was then the lovely old city of Coventry.

But the most striking and significant phase of all Mr. Churchill's munitioning activities, is that constituted by his unremitting endeavour to be not only abreast of the times, but ahead of them, in the application of science to war. And here he had the advantage of operating through civilians, who were free from those professional inhibitions that made the army a stronghold of resistance to progress, and were not unknown even in the navy. He was perhaps right when he said that he was not an inventor, in the sense of working out his ideas to the point of practical application—that he could leave to others. Had he possessed the genius of a Faraday or an Edison, he could never have hoped to design working models of all the innumerable devices appropriate to mechanized war.

It was not an inventor, as such, who was wanted for a Minister of Munitions, but a man of inventive vision, capable of anticipating the direction of scientific progress, and infusing the spirit of that progress into the nation's war effort. Of all his contemporaries there was none so ideally fitted to play that part as Winston Churchill.

Test his performance in the light of events. It will hardly be disputed that the three most fruitful lines of progress during the last war were those associated with the aeroplane, with chemical warfare, and with the tank. And in every one of these Churchill may rank as one of the earliest pioneers; along each he pressed enthusiastically forward with all his fertility in suggestion, and all his driving power. All the time he had to battle against the inertia and active opposition of minds petrified in the most conservative of all traditions.

Of his pioneership of air war I have already spoken; to the possibilities of gas he had been keenly alive long before the Germans sprung it as a ghastly surprise on the unprepared Allies, and he had been at much pains to unearth the century-old secret bequeathed by that inventive genius of the Nelsonian navy, Admiral Cochrane, in which the whole idea of gas war is foreshadowed, and which Kitchener had turned down because it was the product of an admiral! Churchill was at that time inhibited, as the Germans were not, from the idea of developing gas for lethal purposes, and was more interested in that of using smoke for a screen, both on land and sea. On April 5th, 1915, he wrote that the subject was simply being pottered with, and impatiently pressed for experiments.

The story has too often been told of his forevision of the tank and its capabilities to need repetition; except to say that from his days at the Admiralty, he had accurately divined the possibilities latent in the new instrument of war, or rather this novel application of an

idea as old in principle as the war chariot. As First Lord, he had placed an order for eighteen experimental tanks—a fact that it had been necessary to conceal from the Brass Hats at the War Office as jealously as from the Germans—and he was no sooner out of the Admiralty than the Sea Lords seized the opportunity for cancelling the whole order. It was only the exertions of two civilians, Mr. Tennyson d'Eyncourt, the chief naval constructor, and Arthur Balfour, the new First Lord, that succeeded in saving from the holocaust one—which proved the mother of all subsequent tanks. Even so, when the tanks were finally almost forced upon them, the Brass Hats took their revenge, by ignoring Churchill's urgent advice not to employ the new weapon until a sufficient quantity had been accumulated to effect a surprise on a great, and possibly decisive scale. But though they lost this advantage, by snatching at the fruit before it was ripe, they providentially scored one far greater than any surprise could have been, by such bogging and bogging of this unsoldierly innovation, as to convince the Germans, until too late, that there was nothing in it.

Once installed at the Munitions' Office, Mr. Churchill was no longer in the position of having to knock vainly at doors that were banged, barred, and bolted against any departure from pre-scientific orthodoxy. He now spoke with authority and was able to devote his too-long-repressed energies, with furious concentration, to the work of speeding up progress, and giving free scope to scientific imagination, in every department of the nation's war effort. Like the good seed in the parable, his inspiration brought forth fruit in multiple abundance, so that in the last year of the War, the Germans, who had started with such a vast mechanical and material advantage, now found themselves fairly overwhelmed under a tempest of steel, that however furiously it beat, showed no signs of exhausting itself; driven out of the air by an ever-mounting superiority in numbers and quality of planes; choked with the fumes of more abundant and deadlier gases than any their factories could turn out; forced to abandon their deadliest weapon of all, that of the submarine blockade, because the seas were so effectively mined and policed as to be converted into one vast death-trap for the attackers; forced back from position to position by massed tank assaults that would go through and over everything, even the *ne plus ultra* Hindenburg Line; until a year before the greatest optimists at Allied headquarters had dared anticipate, they flung down their arms and roared for mercy.

It may have been the triumph of mechanism over men, but that is modern war, and he who wills the end must also provide the means. And for victory in such a contest, no small part of the credit is due to the provider in chief.

But there was something more, and perhaps hardly less important, that had been achieved at the Ministry of Munitions. For there the man who was to be charged with the defence of civilization in a

deadlier crisis and against more staggering odds than any dreamed of in the First World War, had served what was perhaps the most essential part of the long apprenticeship to which Providence had bound him.

## VII POST-WAR

### I.

ONE IS tempted to wonder what might have been the course of world history if Mr. Lloyd George, or any major statesman, had come forward on the morrow of victory to take his career and reputation in his hands, and summon all men of goodwill to be guided not by their passions, but by their principles; and to make it clear that he, for one, would be party to no peace that was not based on principles worthy of British, and of Christian civilization. Certainly he would have had to face a terrifying ebullition of all those base passions that are generated behind the front in a struggle for national existence, passions that would have been sedulously and skilfully fomented by the arts of machine- and money-powered propaganda. He might have gone under for a time; but it is permissible to believe that the appeal from Demos drunk to Demos sobered would, before long, have raised him to a position of greater power than ever—a position that might have enabled him to give an effective lead not only to his own, but to other nations, so that at the parting of the ways, that of peace and civilized progress might have been chosen.

One cannot tell, because all with one accord let this greatest of opportunities go by default. There is one little incident that may be taken as marking the first fatal step along the line of least resistance. It appears that Mr. Churchill's first impulse after the Armistice had been one of characteristically chivalrous magnanimity towards the starving and still blockaded foe, and that he had gone to Mr. Lloyd George with the proposal to rush a dozen foodships into Hamburg. The Premier, a humane man, and a sincere Christian, had turned a favourable eye on the proposal. But he had another eye that he was unable to pluck out and cast from him. "We had to realize", as he is reported afterwards to have said, "that public hatred against Germany was too intense to have tolerated such a move on our part." \* At the time of making that petty refusal, Mr. Lloyd George had risen—not without cause—to a position of greater power and prestige than any statesman in British history. From that point his decline was swift and continuous. He had

\* Emil Ludwig, *Leaders of Europe*, p. 243.

forsaken the high way of statesmanship for the low way of practical politics, and practical politics was to prove his undoing—along with that of the victory by which he had thought to end war.

In an incredibly short time after the Armistice, passions had been unloosed that would have made the bare accusation of magnanimity tantamount to one of treason. Lloyd George's first move had been to cash in on his prestige by dishing his fellow Liberals of Asquith's following (who were dished enough already) in a general election the effect of which would be to establish him in a sort of constitutional dictatorship, with an overwhelming majority pledged to his personal support. Soon a competition in demagoguery had set in, in which the language used, to deliriously applauding mobs, would have come better from rum-drunken buccaneers, dividing the spoils of a sacked city, than from civilized statesmen. The Premier led the way with a promise to search the German pockets; another minister actually talked of squeezing the lemon till the pips squeaked; financial magnates tabled astronomical figures of prospective loot—or, as it was called, reparations. And a cry was raised for trying and hanging (the two were assumed to be the same) King George V's Cousin William, who had become a sort of symbolic bogey man. Never were dragon's teeth more recklessly sown.

Mr. Churchill—and he has not attempted to deny it—was sucked into this maelstrom with the rest of them. The most that he can plead—and it is more than most of his colleagues could have done—was that he was as sane as he dared be. He could not resist the demand for bringing the Kaiser to trial, but he did draw the line—a bold enough one in that atmosphere—against guaranteeing execution in advance. He used big words about reparations, but they were cunningly qualified. He would make the Germans pay ten times as much as the French in 1871—which went down wonderfully, till it was found that other competitors were budgeting for anything over a hundred! And there is this to be said for him—his opinions on the peace would be more or less academic, for he would have no hand in framing it. The Premier had not selected him for membership of the team of negotiators he was taking to Paris. He wished to use his abilities, in his reconstructed Government, in a high departmental post similar to the one he was leaving. In the first days of the new year he gave him the choice between the War Office and the Admiralty, with the Air included in either case. Churchill's first and natural choice was the Admiralty—it was only human that he should have wanted to return again in triumph to the Board he had left under a cloud, three and a half years previously. But there was more important work to be done in demobilising the army, and the Premier rightly wished to have his strongest man for this critical task. So he persuaded him to go back on his former decision, and take the Army—with of course, the Air thrown in. That would give him the unique ministerial experience of having had all three services, as well as munitions, under his control. It was



almost as if Mr. Lloyd George had foreseen that he was training the next War Premier.

2.

It would be an easy lead to deplore the failure of Mr. Lloyd George to avail himself to the full of Churchill's counsel and support in the shaping of the peace terms. His younger colleague's magnanimous instincts and the commanding vision of which he had given such frequent proof, might have been supposed capable, if anything could have been, of discovering some wiser alternative to the most fatal of all settlements. But, pleasing as such speculation might have been, we are debarred from it by Mr. Churchill himself, who, in the calm of mature reflection, ten years after the event, was frank enough to indicate, in what he describes as an armistice dream, the ideal peace settlement that might have been framed between a Triumvirate of Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and President Wilson (the representative of Italy being somewhat invidiously left out of it), assuming them to have done the things that, in his opinion, they ought to have done. And he turns out to have performed what might have been thought the impossible feat of devising a settlement, that he himself would probably now admit to have been fraught with more swift and certain disaster than that actually concluded.

For what he proposed was nothing less than that—to quote the last of his imaginary Triumvirate's three vital resolutions—“*Germany shall be invited to aid in the liberation of Russia, and the rebuilding of Eastern Europe.*” And he makes it perfectly plain what this is intended to imply. So far from disarming the defeated German army, he proposes to take it into alliance, and turn it loose upon Bolshevik Russia. “To lay hands on Russia . . . is morally too big a task for the victors alone. If we are to accomplish this it can only be with the aid of Germany.” In other words, the armies of Hindenburg and Ludendorff are to reconstitute the Eastern front, and resume the *Drang nach Osten*, with Allied support. And “this”, as the Churchillian Big Three are made to pronounce, “will be Germany's opportunity”; which it certainly would have been—gratefully accepted and duly followed up.

It must be remembered that this dream was dreamed in 1929, when Hitler was still a comparatively unregarded agitator, and Locarno a name to conjure with.\* But even so, some profound emotional upheaval must be sought for to explain so monstrous an aberration.

Perhaps the simplest, though not the kindest way of stating it, would be that of Lloyd George himself, who, as early as April 1919, in discussing Churchill with Bonar Law, remarked that he had Bolshevism on the brain, since he was even then mad for

\* *World Crisis*, Vol. V, pp. 22-27.

operations in Russia, with German troops. He can at least be credited with appreciating the overmastering importance for good or evil—and in his view it was wholly for evil—of the Communist revolution in Russia.\* It was not only the horrors of massacre and cruelty on a scale unapproached in modern history, and their accompaniment of famine and pestilence devastating vast tracts of the earth's surface, that made him see Red; but also the feeling that here was a major menace to civilization itself, and that the men who had brought this calamity on Russia would, according to their own avowed policy, never rest till they had made their revolution world-wide, and submerged the whole of civilization under the same Red flood that had engulfed Russia. His mind became worked up to just such a state of fine frenzy as that of Burke, when he had called the despots of Europe to crusade against the French Revolution. And so completely had this taken possession of him that he was ready to forget the menace even of Prussian militarism, in face of the new abomination of desolation that had risen in the East. And even his outlook on the social question at home was determined, during the next few years, by his resolve to counteract any tendency to let in the thin end of the Bolshevik wedge.

There was, of course, no question of his being able to put into practice his desire for a working alliance with the spike-helmeted officers and gentlemen who had given such proof of their quality in France and Belgium. He was not in the War Cabinet, and matters of high policy were no part of his responsibility at the War Office. But his control of the army placed him in a favourable position for affording aid and comfort to those heterogeneous and scattered Russian forces that were striving, with some apparent hope of success, to effect a counter-Revolution against the new Red Tsars. There were, indeed, already British forces marooned throughout the bitter Arctic winter in the neighbourhood of Archangel, and though he had had no hand in initiating this policy, he had to see that they were properly supported, and even reinforced while they were there; and that when they were withdrawn, it should be with credit to themselves, and after doing the little that was possible for the White Russian elements they were forced to abandon, and some of whom showed their gratitude by going Bolshevik and turning their arms against them. Under the circumstances he could hardly have done otherwise. But what was of more dubious import was his determination to afford the White Russian armies all the support he could, which principally took the form of munitions that had been piled up, thanks to the efforts of his former department, for the use of the Allies against Germany; though assuredly, if he could have had his way, he would have added human to material assistance, since he was firmly convinced that the Bolshevik regime was inherently rotten, and only wanted a determined push to make it collapse. It is extraordinary that, with all his historical knowledge,

\* Lord Riddell, *Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference*, p. 50.

it should never have occurred to him that that was precisely the mistake of the leagued Potentates who supported similar movements in France against the Revolution, and that these very attempts to restore something like the old regime by force of arms, were bound to arouse all the latent patriotism of the Russian nature, and enlist it on the side of the Soviets. Lenin and Trotzky could have prayed for no more invaluable support than that of Winston Churchill. Fortunately both for his own reputation, and for the country, his power was limited by the steady determination of Lloyd George not to shed British blood or waste British treasure in an anti-Bolshevik crusade.

Meanwhile there was ample scope for Mr. Churchill's talents, in the difficult, and even dangerous business, of getting the victorious army safely resolved into its civilian elements. The soldiers, like everybody else in the war, had been keyed up to a state of extreme nervous tension, which the sudden collapse of the enemy had snapped. They ceased to feel themselves as conquering heroes, and had become an immense crowd of working men away from their homes, conscious that the longer they were kept away from their jobs, the less chance there would be of their finding any jobs to get back to. The well-intentioned efforts of the authorities to get the key men back first, aroused fury in those who had passed years in the trenches and saw recently arrived conscripts sent home before them. Everywhere the bonds of discipline were relaxed; in some places they were snapped altogether, and there were riots and even mutinies. It required just such a human and sympathetic touch as Churchill knew how to apply, to prevent these from resulting in serious bloodshed, or from getting completely out of hand. Even more than at the Ministry of Munitions, it was an inconspicuous service he had to perform; for there was as much object in hushing up the news of trouble in the forces, as there was in isolating fires on a dry prairie. And the very absence of publicity was the measure of his success in tiding over an acutely dangerous situation, modifying the demobilization orders so as to convince the men that the authorities were out to give them a fair deal all round, and preserving that firm front on the Rhine which was still necessary if the Germans were to be convinced of the necessity of accepting the terrific peace terms, about whose exact nature the representatives of the victor Powers were still haggling and disputing in Paris.

### 3.

During the two years of Churchill's tenure of the War Office, something like an incipient rift might have been detected in his relations with his old ally, the Prime Minister. For Lloyd George was vehemently out of sympathy with what he was later to describe as Churchill's "morbid detestation" of the Russian revolution. With all his mental agility, and his incalculable changes of front,

there were one or two subjects on which Lloyd George remained invincibly fixed in the Gladstonian Liberal tradition in which he had been born and bred. And his consequent detestation of the ancient regime in Russia made him revolt from the idea of a crusade to bring it, or anything like it, back; and he was, as he himself put it, "very alarmed" at his War Minister's drive for active intervention, and, in fact, urgently enjoined him not to commit the country "to what would be a purely mad enterprise out of hatred of Bolshevik principles". This was effective, in so far as it induced his fiery colleague to make a virtue of necessity, and conform to his chief's policy of leaving Russia to work out her own salvation or otherwise. But it may be taken as marking the beginning of a certain mistrust that comes out plainly, years later, in his *War Memoirs*, and it may well have been this incident that he had in mind when he wrote of Churchill that "men of his ardent temperament and powerful mentality need exceptionally strong brakes".

But he had sufficient appreciation of his War-Minister's genius, to recognize that once the demobilization was completed, he was wasted as caretaker of what had now become a skeleton army and air force which, it was confidently believed, would never again be employed in a major conflict. Churchill's own desire was the very natural one for the Chancellorship of Exchequer, the robes of which he still preserved as an heirloom from his father; and on the reshuffling of posts in the ministry, that took place early in 1931, this would have seemed his natural destination. But Lloyd George thought otherwise; he had a solid business man for the post in Sir Robert Horne, and he could find better use for Churchill's imaginative brilliance in another direction.

For not the least of the many troubles that were crowding in upon the Premier, sprang from the signal failure of the victorious Allies to conciliate Moslem sentiment in those countries of the Middle East that they had torn from the Turkish yoke, and of which, under the convenient style of mandate, they were now seeking to assume control. Almost the last straw on the back of the already overburdened British taxpayer was constituted by the need to employ a large army to crush an Arab revolt in Mesopotamia, and thereafter to hold down the country; while Palestine, Transjordan, and Egypt were smouldering with unrest that might at any moment burst into flame. The plain fact is that the Arabs, who had done such marvels in what they had fondly imagined to be the war of their own liberation, now felt themselves, not without cause, to be the victims of a shameful breach of faith. The greedy imperialism of the French was not to be denied the coveted prize of Syria; and Damascus, the most ancient of all cities, which the victorious Arab bands had entered on the heels of the Turks, had been attacked by a French army which, thanks to its modern weapons, had driven out its Arab Emir Feisal, and slaughtered many of his bravest chiefs. Having thus killed, and also taken possession,

these extremely dubious allies proceeded to sit down on their own bayonets in Syria, while the great heart of that Lawrence, whose name will be linked with Arabia as long as that of the Prophet himself, received a mortal blow from the discovery of the confidence trick of which, as Arab leader, he had been made the unwilling instrument.

The two most remarkable Englishmen of modern times were bound to gravitate towards each other; and they had made contact in the spring of 1919 at Paris, whither Lawrence had come with the passionate desire to obtain justice for his friend and comrade, Feisal. Churchill had asked him to lunch, and the encounter had been characteristic of both men; for it appears that some tactless guest had tried to enliven the proceedings by retailing a story about Lawrence publicly refusing a decoration from King George, in a way that would have constituted an unpardonable breach of good manners. The story seems to have been grossly distorted, Lawrence having merely pleaded to be excused the honour—one that his sensitive conscience felt to be rooted in dishonour—at a private audience. But it was like Lawrence not to have bothered, or condescended, to give the true explanation, and like Churchill to have let his guest know in no uncertain terms what he thought about it; and it is like both men that they were none the worse friends afterwards.

In fact it would appear that it was Lawrence's influence and suggestion that had no small part in inducing Lloyd George to appoint Churchill to the Colonial Secretaryship, with the specific function of gathering up all the threads of the Middle Eastern situation into his hands, and in particular, of getting it free from the heavy-handed, imperialist diplomacy of Lord Curzon, at the Foreign Office.\* It was certainly a post to which, both by experience and temperament, he was far more obviously fitted than to the Exchequer.

Nor was he long in making it clear that like so many of Lloyd George's flashes of intuition, this one would be justified by results. The new minister was no sooner appointed than he hastened to return the pass to Lawrence. As Churchill seems to have divined from the first, the young hero of the desert *was* the East, for all practical purposes; what he did not know about it was not worth knowing, and what he could not do might be ruled out as impossible. Accordingly Churchill's first step was to convene at Cairo a grand conference of all those responsible for the control of the Near East, and thither he repaired in the company of Lawrence, as well as that of Major Hubert Young, and Sir Hugh Trenchard from the Air Ministry, about as able a combination as could have been got together.

This reliance on anyone so unorthodox as Lawrence was received with frank consternation in high official circles. Genius

\* Liddell Hart, *Colonel Lawrence*, p. 334.

such as his, openly contemptuous as it was of the right people and their correct way of doing things, was a disturbing factor that if it could not be suppressed, had got to be explained away. This latter feat was not so easy, in view of the amazing record of achievement that Lawrence had to his credit; but a whispering and head-shaking campaign was successful enough in convincing those who wanted to be convinced, that he was an impossible person, a self-advertising charlatan, and that given his advantages any military or civil expert could have done all or more than he had, without making so much fuss about it—that one or two, indeed, had actually done so. The Colonial Secretary would soon find out his mistake in endeavouring to work through one who, like Gordon, was a law unto himself.

Luckily geniuses, like the gods, are to each other not unknown; and the man who had summoned Fisher to the Admiralty was not likely to be terrified by the prospect of working with Lawrence. He put complete reliance on him, and he was amply justified by results. No one could have worked for him with greater loyalty and self-effacement, no one could have handled the problem in a spirit of saner realism, than the man who had founded his career upon the Seven Pillars of Wisdom.

Thanks to Lawrence's inspiration, what had seemed an almost hopelessly involved situation was cleared up by a few bold strokes of policy. The injured Emir Feisal—let the French gibber and gesticulate as much as they pleased—was given to the Mesopotamian Arabs, who received him with joy, as their King, and left to carry on as an independent sovereign under benevolent British tutelage that was obtruded as little as possible. The great and expensive British army was withdrawn, and the responsibility for guarding against another revolutionary upheaval was committed to the air force, which—though the Brass Hats predicted all sorts of horrible things—could control the desert more effectively, and at a fraction of the expense, besides being a source of far less irritation, by reason of its comparative invisibility in a loop of the Euphrates.

So the burden of Mesopotamia, or as it was to be called in future, Irak, was neatly lifted from the shoulders of the British Government and taxpayer. But there was a tougher problem to be faced in the Hinterland of Palestine, or Trans-Jordan, to give it its new name. There was luckily at hand another scion of the great Shereefian House, Feisal's brother, Abdulla. But Abdulla—if I may borrow a term from a Kentish rustic—was not at first disposed to be very sociable. For it was into these regions that his countrymen, who had been flung out of the Syrian Naboth's vineyard, had retired, and neither they, nor Abdulla himself, were minded to leave the spoils in peaceful possession. The gallant chief had himself gone to the neighbourhood of the frontier to organize operations, that, besides being quite hopeless, would have been extremely embarrassing to the British power, which was

formally responsible for his base of operations. This must be stopped; and there was only one man whose influence and authority with the Arabs were great enough to stop it. Lawrence was an old comrade-in-arms of Abdulla's, so he flew to his headquarters at Amman and motored him to Jerusalem, where Winston Churchill was awaiting them and, as we learn from Sir Ronald Storrs, "so appreciative . . . of the beauty of the temple area by moonlight, that he seemed thereafter to grudge every moment spent away from his easel".\* Half an hour's talk on the Mount of Olives was enough to convince Churchill, whose record as Kingmaker was coming to equal that of Warwick himself, that in Abdulla he had a man fit to lord it over those desert spaces once swayed by Sihon King of the Amorites and Og the King of Basan; and with one of his characteristically rapid decisions, he sent him back, in the capacity of Emir, on the strict understanding that he kept the peace with the French.

Thus, in Lawrence's own words, Churchill "made straight all the tangle, finding solutions fulfilling (I think) our promises in letter and spirit (where humanly possible) without sacrificing any interest of our Empire or any interest of the peoples concerned."† That is high praise indeed from such a source, nor is it an isolated instance; for of all Mr. Churchill's many personal conquests none appears to have been more unqualified than that of this almost unconquerable spirit. Lawrence was full of gratitude to the man who had enabled him—as far as it lay in England's power—to realize his dearest wish, and retrieve the honour he had pledged to the Arabs; the man, moreover, who, throughout the period of their association, had, as he humbly acknowledged, been for him "so considerate as sometimes to seem more like a senior partner than a master".‡

But though the work accomplished by Lawrence during his year of service under Churchill was pronounced by him to be the best he had ever done, it is characteristic of him that once it *was* done, and all things ordered and settled, as he believed, on the best and surest foundations in the Arab states, nothing would induce him to go on. He was a poor man, and by Churchill's good offices the greatest employments in the Imperial service might have been open to him. There even seems to have been some idea of making him High Commissioner of Egypt, though Lawrence himself barred this by stipulating that he should divest himself of official pomp and devote himself, in accordance with the best Oriental tradition, to going about among the people and learning their minds at first hand. Failing this—if it was ever definitely intended—nothing would tempt him. His job, he said, was finished.

And when pressed on the subject he merely smiled, and said, "All you will see of me is a small cloud of dust on the horizon."

Their friendship did not cease after the severance of their official

\* *Orientations*, p. 506.

† *Seven Pillars*, p. 276.

‡ R. Graves, *Lawrence and the Arabs*, p. 397.

relations, but lasted on, sporadically and casually as was the way of Lawrence's contacts, to his tragic end. And it is perhaps worth recording that among the meanest of all the persecutions he had to endure from those who, jealous of his genius, could neither forgive, nor understand, his resolve to serve the State in the lowest and most menial capacity, was their refusal to allow him to stop in the air force except on the monstrous condition of his undertaking not to visit or speak to a number of specified great persons, among whom Churchill was included, and who all happened to belong to His Majesty's Opposition.\* This formal and probably unprecedented assertion of the principle that a common soldier is a being of inferior caste, who even off duty must be taught his place and made to keep it, emanated, curiously or not, from a Government that specifically claimed to represent the cause of the common people against wealth and privilege.

#### 4.

The Churchill-Lawrence combination had had such signal success in straightening out the situation in the Near East, that towards the end of 1921 the Colonial Secretary was free to turn his attention from the affairs of his own department, to the settlement of an even more momentous controversy, and one that like a septic wound had diffused its poison through the body politic of the British nation for many generations past.

His last intervention in Irish affairs had been seven years before, in that unhappy episode of the Curragh mutiny, the most regrettable of his career. Since then, the train of consequences set in motion by the attempt to force the Catholic yoke on the Protestants, had gone forward inevitably from the arming of the Protestants to that of the Catholics; to the concentration of all power in the hands of the extremists; and finally to a civil war, or war of independence, of a kind to which there are happily few historical parallels; a war not of honourable combat, but of treachery and secret assassination, conducted with every aggravation of bestial cruelty by gangsters and gunmen, masquerading as peaceful civilians; a war in which foul deeds generated their kind in reprisals hardly less ferocious.

But the karma laid up for herself by Britain in the course of her many misdealings with Ireland in the past—in which for some reason she always seemed fated to reveal herself in her worst aspect—could be fulfilled in no other way. The devils that were unloosed against her were of her own raising. And now she was sweating blood in the quest for a settlement that might have been got long before on much more favourable terms, as an act of her own grace.

Churchill had been too busily occupied in the affairs of his own departments to have had any but the most distant connection

\* Liddell Hart, *op. cit.*, p. 349.



with Lloyd George's successive attempts, first by conciliation and then by the sword, to improvise a settlement—any settlement that would get it off his hands—of this dreadful imbroglio. His part in the drama began in the Autumn of 1921, when, as the sequel of a courageous visit to Belfast, and a noble appeal for conciliation by George V, a formal armistice had been concluded between the contending forces, and, after a good deal of manoeuvring for position, plenipotentiaries were appointed to negotiate in London a final settlement of the relations between England and Ireland, and between the two nations of Ireland. The English delegates were the Premier, Austen Chamberlain, Churchill, his old friend F. E. Smith, now Lord Birkenhead, and two others.

Once having arrived at this stage, the business of drafting a treaty ought to have been one of straightforward adjustment. There had gone up such an immense sigh of relief, both in England and Ireland, when the foul killing competition had been called off, that it seemed impossible it could ever be resumed. And by this time everybody, not wilfully blind, knew perfectly well the broad lines on which a settlement had got to be concluded, those that Churchill himself, when he had allowed his wisdom and not his passion to guide him, had all along perceived to be the right ones. Somehow within the elastic framework of the Commonwealth, Catholic Ireland must be set free to determine its own destinies. But what was sauce for the Catholic goose was equally so for the Protestant gander, if only for the admitted reason that there was no power in Ireland capable of coercing the Covenanters. Sensible men of goodwill had only to recognize what stared them in the face, and get down to the business of embodying these obvious principles in a formal agreement.

But sense and goodwill had not exactly marked the dealings of England and Ireland in the past, and they were a good deal to expect from the organizers of a murder campaign, most of whom had recently been on the run with a price on their heads. Churchill, who threw himself into the struggle for peace with a concentrated energy not to be denied, and who, more perhaps than the Premier himself, was the inspiring spirit of the English team, must have looked anxiously to the other side for some point of possible contact. He found it in a spirit strangely akin to his own, that of Michael Collins, the fighting leader of the rebellion, and the man whose will-power was strong enough to carry his colleagues along with him in any settlement at which he might arrive.

Now it may seem an invidious feat to discover a kindred spirit to Churchill's in this man, who was wanted for a dozen murders, and had borne his full part in waging war by gangster methods with which Churchill would assuredly rather have died than sully his hands. But in dealing with the darker manifestations of Irish patriotism, we need constantly to bear in mind the wise words that Churchill has himself prefixed to his chapter on this part of his story,

*"Tout savoir, c'est tout comprendre."* It is only by understanding how the iron of oppression has, through many generations of her most distressful history, eaten into the Irish soul, that we can realize a state of mind in which the criminal becomes the hero, provided only that he is against the Government and against the law, and in which even a leader of gunmen may turn out to be a good fellow to meet, warm-hearted and generous—as impulsive as a boy, and as temperamental as a girl. And yet, for all the natural liking that Churchill could not withhold from a gallant opponent, and particularly one whose impulsive disposition so largely resembled his own, he is frank enough to admit that "deep in my heart there was a certain gulf between us". It is not difficult to understand what lies behind this most significant admission. For between the honourable soldier and the secret assassin, whatever understanding there might be, there must needs be a gulf fixed—and, if we may judge by one revealing incident that he records, it was not only Churchill who realized it:

"I am sure", he said, on one occasion, "you would much rather have fought properly in the field."

Collins responded with a pathetic eagerness; how he had written a paper on the status of belligerents; how impossible it had been to organize a uniformed force; how, in short, he had been under the compulsion of necessity. That—so far as such a plea can ever be—was undeniable. And yet there was blood on his hand, and it must have been hard to grasp without repressing a shudder.

Nevertheless Churchill realized in the depths of his soul what a supreme opportunity had presented itself of getting this Irish tumour at long last cut out of England's system, and was determined not to let it slip by any means whatever. And he seems rightly to have divined that the best chance of driving through the treaty was to establish sympathetic co-operation between himself and Collins. It was perhaps the most difficult of all the many tasks of personal conquest he had set himself; for the young Irishman was subject to incalculable moods, and when the black clouds had settled on him, was almost impossible to deal with. One of these occasions was in Churchill's house, where several of the meetings took place, and among other reproaches with which Collins was fraying everyone's temper, he fired off one about the price that had been set on his head. Whereupon his host took down from the wall a framed copy of a Boer notice offering £25 for his own recapture, whereas Collins, as he reminded him, had been priced at £5,000. "How would you like that?"

This was more than "the big fellow" could resist. He burst into a peal of laughter; the cloud was lifted, and for the rest of the meeting he was ready to feed out of Churchill's hand. But one would like to know whether he can possibly have realized what was the real point of the joke, namely, that as on the occasion of his first question

record since, he was still under the cloud of the Gallipoli failure. And now he had filled the cup of his unpopularity in Tory circles by his notorious forwardness in driving through the Irish Treaty. There would be more enthusiasm among the crew for making him walk the plank than the skipper himself, nor, if he tried to swim back to the ship, was there the least hope of their fishing him out.

In the Autumn of 1922, the Coalition, in addition to its other troubles, found itself faced with an international crisis of the first order. Of all the defeated enemies, it was the despised and effete Turk who first made the great recovery and threw off the burden of Allied peace conditions. This was partly because Turkey had produced in Mustapha Kemal, the officer who had stolen a march on poor old General Stopford at Suvla Bay, the first and by far the most respectable of the breed of post-war dictators; partly because the French had discovered that it suited their interest to go behind the backs of their allies of the Marne, and while acting in ostensible concert with them, supply arms and encouragement to the common and still unvanquished enemy.

Lloyd George, by what must be the admission of even his staunchest defender, had been hopelessly at fault, from the first, in his handling of this situation. No doubt the almost superhuman labours he had had to undertake for so many years had exhausted even his reserves of nervous energy, and left him like a wizard who had forgotten his spell. But the circumstances of this particular case were also such as to bring to the surface certain deep-seated relicts of his youthful Liberalism. He instinctively thought of the Turk as the villain and the Greek as the hero of a pure Gladstonian melodrama; and by inciting the armies of Hellas to win back their ancient Ionian inheritance, and to stamp out whatever embers there might still be of barbarian intransigence in the heart of Asia Minor, he reckoned on doing the right thing by a most convenient proxy. Unfortunately the Greeks got into the middle of Asia Minor and remained hopelessly stuck there, while, with the French sedulously queering the pitch, the Turks waxed stronger and stronger; and then the Greeks, only too true to classical form, drove out their patriot leader, Venizelos, and wantonly deprived themselves of the last vestige of English sympathy, by recalling from exile the notorious pro-German King Constantine, amid just such scenes of effervescent jubilation as had greeted the return of Alcibiades. Those whom the gods so evidently wished to destroy it was beyond the power of man to save; and it was only a question of time before the disillusioned and disheartened Greek armies were bolting in wild confusion to the coast, with the Turks at their heels, and their precious Sovereign scuttling back into exile just in time to escape the fate meted out by an enraged people to the agents of his policy.

Now Churchill had had neither part nor lot in this Hellenic gamble of Lloyd George's, and had in fact earnestly warned him against letting loose the Greek armies on a task that, as Marshal

Foch had also clearly foreseen, was beyond their military strength. But now that the mischief was done, and the Turk, flushed with victory, was marching on the Straits and Constantinople, round the approaches to which the Allies had drawn a neutral zone, and where their troops stood on guard, all his fighting instincts were aroused. To fling open the gate of Europe at the first summons of the lately defeated enemy would be shame unspeakable, and besides, would almost certainly result in the Turk making such a Christian shambles at Constantinople, as he had just done at the port of Smyrna. And there was another motive that may, though perhaps subconsciously, have been most powerful of all in stiffening his resolution. To repeat the most bitter failure of his life, to see the Dardanelles abandoned a second time to the Turk, was more than his proud spirit could brook.

Here then, with appalling suddenness, the country, still morally and physically exhausted from the effects of one war, saw itself faced with the prospect of another, that would almost certainly have lit up the flames of Mohammedan fanaticism throughout the whole Near and Middle East, and might well have spread even further and more catastrophically. In the state of impoverishment and unrest then prevailing, it was more than probable that the attempt to force the country into another Gallipoli, and another Mesopotamia, and perhaps another Indian Mutiny, on an issue that not one Englishman in a hundred cared a tinker's curse about, would have led to the collapse not only of the Government, but to that of the already dangerously overstrained framework of society.

And yet the men in whose hands the decision rested appear to have regarded the prospect of war with a levity almost unbelievable. Mr. Wickham Steed, than whom there is no more distinguished authority on matters of foreign policy, had even gone so far as to frame the terrible indictment, that "the inner group of the Cabinet or, at all events, Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Winston Churchill, were disposed to think that a little Anglo-Turkish war might not be an unmitigated evil, since it would allow a general election to be held with a good chance of securing a minor khaki majority for a Coalition or Middle Party Government";\* and even if so murderously cynical a calculation may be ruled out of the range of psychological conceivability, it is only too evident that Mr. Churchill—with whose motives alone we are concerned—had allowed his natural combativeness to take charge of his judgment as completely as it had at the time of the Curragh.

He it was who drew up the flamboyantly defiant manifesto in which the Government proclaimed to the world its intention of opposing by every means the advance of the Turks into the neutral zones, or any attempt to cross into Europe; he too who drafted telegrams to the Dominions soliciting for the offer of military contingents, an appeal that produced ominously temporizing responses from Canada and South Africa.

\* *The Real Stanley Baldwin*, p. 34.

But if the attitude of the Dominions was dubious, so mild a word could not be used about that of France and Italy, who were as explicitly committed as Britain to the defence of the Straits. Mussolini's Italians nobody expected to fight or keep faith, but it was a different matter when the French contingent turned tail, and slunk off in their wake, exposing the mere handful of British, with their backs to the Narrows, at Chanak, to put up what resistance they could against overwhelming odds.

Luckily the test was not applied. Mustapha Kemal was a fearless and a dashing soldier, but his head was cooler than those of the British ministers, and it would have been unmilitary folly to plunge into war with the Empire, when he could get practically all he wanted by a little patience and diplomacy. But a dictator on the make has above all things to save his face and avoid anything like an open repulse, and the situation was dangerous to the last degree, with the Turks swarming into the forbidden zone, and right up to the wire in front of the British entrenchments.

But there was, up to this point, a case—one that Mr. Churchill has not failed to make—for the policy of grasping the Turkish nettle with the utmost firmness, and trusting to Kemal's enlightened self-interest not to take the initiative in precipitating a war. But this case falls to the ground when the Government itself abandons its attitude of "thus far and no further", and seizes the initiative in an ultimatum ordering the Turks to quit the neutral zone forthwith, or take the consequences. Such a challenge would leave Kemal with no way out but that of the sword.

And such was the reckless mood that now possessed the war party in the Cabinet, that the British general on the spot, Sir Charles Harington, was actually ordered to deliver this virtual declaration of a most wicked and unnecessary war, on an enemy who desired nothing better than an excuse to avoid it. It was in vain that Lord Curzon, at the Foreign Office, who, in his own words, had had "to sustain the battle single-handed against all the fire-eaters and warmongers", pleaded for delay, and that the newest and least regarded member of the Cabinet, Stanley Baldwin, rallied to his support—the sons of Zeruiah, in the shape of the Premier and Colonial Secretary, were too hard for him, and had so worked upon the rest of their colleagues, as to render them deaf to remonstrance and blind to the consequences—or what would have been the consequences if their order had ever been acted on. But by what would appear to be a signal instance of that special favour that, according to Milton, God reserves for his Englishmen, "Tim" Harington was one of that rare type of soldiers who would sooner triumph by avoiding war, than by making it. He accordingly took the responsibility of ignoring his instructions, and proceeding, by tactful and friendly discussion with the commander on the other side, to relax the tension and persuade the Turk to hold his hand until the substance of his demands on Greece could be peacefully handed over to him

by diplomatic means—a consummation that neither England nor, perhaps, in the long run, the Greeks themselves, had any real interest in preventing.

Thus, by the grace of God and General Harington, England had escaped from the greatest peril that was to threaten her between the two world wars, with an honour that stood out all the more conspicuously in contrast with the unprofitably ignominious figure cut by her late allies. To those who did not know how, against all human probability, the country had been saved in spite of the Government, it might have seemed that Mr. Lloyd George had only to cash in at the polls on the kudos of Peace with Honour, to restore the failing fortunes of his Coalition, and obtain another five years lease of power from the electorate. It is pretty evident that he thought so himself, and that Winston Churchill, as the chief promoter of the policy of defiance, heartily agreed with him.

This, at anyrate, may fairly be deduced from the fact that it was Churchill who, on Wednesday October 11th, invited the Premier and the leading Unionist members of the Cabinet to a dinner at his house, at which it was decided to rush through an immediate election. On the following Saturday the Premier, full of confidence and jubilation, went down to Manchester to deliver himself of one of the finest specimens of his invective, in which he trounced and blackguarded the Turks in the richest Gladstonian vein, let the world know exactly what he thought about the French, and ended with a thundering peroration about Britain, Great Britain, having kept her faith. That speech knocked the last nail into his political coffin. On the following evening there was a second dinner at Mr. Churchill's house, but this time with the momentous abstention of Lord Curzon, who had decided that he could stand it no longer, and that the time had come to join with Bonar Law, and practically the whole body of the Conservative back-benchers, in liquidating the Coalition, and going to the country with what might be described as a gilt-edged Conservative programme, from which all adventure and wizardry should be banned.

On the following Thursday a meeting of Unionist members was called at the Carlton Club, at which the long-threatened mutiny was consummated. Lloyd George instantly resigned, and with him, into the wilderness, went the Conservative chiefs who had supported him and—of course—Winston Churchill.

## 6.

If, at the outset of his career, Mr. Churchill had chanced to meet Macbeth's witches, one can, with some confidence, assert that they would have warned him to beware of the Dardanelles. For it was these ill-omened straits that had been the occasion of the sort of fall that would have been certainly fatal to any ordinary statesman's

ambitions. And now that he had not only won for himself a second chance, but for five years in the highest offices of state had performed services for the country whose value it would be hardly possible to over-estimate, the Dardanelles had tripped him up again, and been the occasion of a second fall which, though less sensational, might, on a sober calculation, have seemed to offer even less chance of recovery than the first.

How disastrous it had been became apparent at the General Election that Bonar Law, with his new hundred-per-cent Conservative ministry, lost not a moment in challenging. If there had been one seat in the country that might for the last dozen years have been regarded as absolutely safe, it had been Churchill's at Dundee. His principal opponent had never been regarded hitherto as much more than an amiable eccentric, whose sole purpose it was to wage a holy and apparently hopeless war upon the liberty of the subject to satisfy his thirst with what was alternatively referred to as "alcohol" or "drink"—and certainly no one who has ever been in Dundee on Saturday night, will fail to understand the strength of good Mr. Scrymgeour's feelings on the subject. But his unfailing candidature at all Mr. Churchill's frequent elections, had never hitherto amounted to more than a rather expensive gesture—nobody, least of all himself, had probably ever thought of his getting in as a serious possibility.

Certainly fortune played the Colonial Secretary a cruel trick when, on the eve of his fall from office, he was stricken down with one of those attacks of appendicitis, in which the doctors are in the happy position of being able to confront a patient with the choice between the operating table and the grave. Long before he was able to stand, the election campaign—Mrs. Churchill having kept the flag flying in his absence—was nearly over, and it was only his indomitable will that enabled him to be borne in an invalid chair to address a couple of final meetings. But where now was the tried and tested loyalty of his Scottish constituents? He was carried to the platform through a yelling and glowering mob that was barely restrained, by his helpless condition, from wreaking its fury on his person. To the proletarian element in the electorate, now greatly strengthened under the new franchise, he was no longer the champion of democratic progress, but the arch-enemy of Russia and all things Red. So they threw him out, and Mr. Scrymgeour in, by a five-figure majority.

So here he was, not only out of office, but out of Parliament, and this time without any prospect of a safe seat being provided for him. For if Dundee was not safe for Liberalism, what seat was? And even supposing him eventually to scrape back into Parliament, by what conceivable turn of events could he ever hope to get back into office? For the election had put it beyond doubt that the swing of the political pendulum would no longer be between Tory and Liberal, but between Conservative and Labour. From both these parties he was equally and emphatically barred. All that appeared to be left for

him was to wait for the coming of the next Liberal Government, which was as good as to say for the next blue moon. By any ordinary reckoning it might have seemed that his ministerial career had come to an absolute dead end.

But no one who had studied his nature in the light of that career, could ever have imagined that he would resign himself to such a conclusion. Defeat was no new experience to him, but never yet had he known what it was to accept defeat. And for those who never say die, dead ends do not exist.

His enforced retirement had not abated in the least degree either his confidence or his energy. He seems to have regarded it rather in the light of an opportunity for making up for arrears of activities from which the cares of state had debarred him. These included his innumerable hobbies, from painting to bricklaying, but, most of all, his master craft of literature. It was now nearly 17 years since he had produced his classic life of his father, and since then he had done nothing, save in the way of casual journalism, to add to his literary laurels. Even though the state of his health forced him to take a six months' holiday on the Riviera, a holiday for him signified no more than a change of occupation. Within a year of his fall from office he had produced the first two bulky volumes of that majestic survey of the war that he has called *The World Crisis*, a book that stands almost in a class of its own, since it is equally a history, and a personal vindication. That is where it differs from that other and later work with which it inevitably invites comparison, the *War Memoirs* of Mr. Lloyd George. For the ex-Premier never allows you for a moment to forget that you are listening to a superb piece of special pleading, that holds you under its spell through the entire length of its six volumes, and gains all the more force from its concentration on the one end—that of its self-imposed brief. But Churchill, whether by nature or by art, does really succeed in conveying the impression that the tremendous events he records constitute the essential theme, even though he views them from his own personal standpoint. He vindicates himself, as it seems, by accident, or necessity, which is by far the most effective way. And in the later volumes, it may be noted, the personal standpoint is discarded more and more for that of the pure historian, to whom the unfolding of the drama is all in all, and whose own part in it is of no disproportionate interest to him. From one volume indeed, that on the Eastern Front, he disappears altogether.

But none of these later volumes had quite the absorbing interest for the reading public of these first two, in which the personal interest was imposed by the nature of the theme, and the story of Antwerp, of Gallipoli, and of his relations with Fisher, was presented in the form of a great prose epic, with such convincing eloquence that instead of being a permanent handicap to his reputation, it caused him to be regarded as the man of vision and genius who, but for the opposition and inertia that thwarted him at every turn,



combined with an abnormal run of ill luck, would have won the war in half the time. The effect on his political fortunes, in this hour of their greatest depression, was incalculable. That on his financial fortunes, also depressed by the loss of his ministerial salary, could be calculated more easily. It was something in the neighbourhood of £20,000.

7.

That was good enough for a start, but the problem of his political recovery remained, and it was the toughest he had ever had to face. How tough we may realize, when we reflect that it was similar to the one that Lloyd George himself, with all the prestige behind him of having won the war and dominated European politics for years after the peace, signally and permanently failed to solve. There was hardly anyone who believed in the Autumn of 1922, that Lloyd George, like Asquith before him, had left Downing Street never to return. And yet his subsequent failure to do so was assuredly not due to any lack of trying. But his fortunes were now entirely bound up with those of the moribund Liberal Party, which his own action had split into the followings of two bitterly hostile leaders. And for Churchill, still ostensibly a Liberal of the Lloyd George faction, to have linked his fortunes with that cause, and that leader, would have been to condemn himself to a blind alley indeed, and one from which even for him there could have been no escape.

Plainly then he had got to disengage himself from his present allegiance and get a lodgment either on the Right or on the Left. But the Left was both politically and morally barred against him, nor would the Labour leaders have dreamed of allowing converted capitalists in, to collar the jobs to which they had worked up. But with the Right it was a different matter. Here the opposition to his return was rather on personal grounds than those of principle. "Your Majesty knows", John Wilkes had remarked to George III, "that I was never a Wilkeite," and Churchill could, with at least equal truth, confide to that unexceptionable Tory, Sir Robert Horne, over the luncheon table, "I am what I have always been—a Tory democrat. Force of circumstances has compelled me to serve with another party, but my views have never changed, and I should be glad to give effect to them by joining the Conservatives."\*

There was his own position in a nutshell. But that the Conservatives themselves would jump at the offer, he could not have been simple enough to believe. The rat who has left the waterlogged ship is not exactly welcomed back on board after she has been safely docked, and has put to sea again, just because the decks of his sometime craft of refuge now happen to be awash. And that, it is to be feared, was the uncharitable view that the average Tory was inclined to take of him. It boiled down to this—the Conservatives would

\* Riddell, *op. cit.*, p. 409.

never have him back for all his wanting and asking, unless it could be made apparent to them that they could not get on without him. And that was very far from being the case at the moment.

The first considerable political pronouncement that he made after his return to England, at the beginning of May, 1923, took the form of a grand appeal to both the traditional parties to sink their differences, and combine to preserve the capitalist system and the foundations of society, against the great, vehement, deliberate attack that was being made on them from the Left; and he warned them that the overthrow of the Coalition, and their own suicidal faction fights, were paving the way for the Socialists to seize power and overwhelm them in a common ruin. No appeal could have been more cunningly adapted to convince all those who imagined themselves to have a stake in the existing order of things, that here was a champion of their cause more Conservative than the Conservatives themselves.

Meanwhile the situation in the party itself had come to reproduce, with weird fidelity, that which had obtained twenty years before at the time when Winston Churchill had been preparing to leave it. Bonar Law, like Lord Salisbury, had gone home to die, and left his successor, the hitherto almost unregarded Stanley Baldwin, to carry on with what amounted to a second-eleven ministry, since the whole body of Conservative elder statesmen, with the solitary but portentous exception of Curzon, were out of office, and the objects of a vindictive heresy hunt on account of their fidelity to Lloyd George. Even before Bonar Law had retired, the evidence of by-elections had shown how quickly popular sentiment had begun to revolt against this inert and unimpressive combination, and for Mr. Baldwin to have clung to office on a merely negative programme, would have been to have repeated Balfour's mistake without Balfour's excuse of patriotic necessity. And the disaster that must have certainly, according to precedent, overwhelmed him at the next appeal to the country, might easily have taken the form anticipated by Churchill of a Socialist landslide.

Whether by instinct or calculation, therefore, he refused to wait for the pendulum to gather additional momentum, but went to the country at once for a mandate of qualified release from the shackles of the Free Trade Dogma. This gave the Liberals the opportunity of uniting on the one point of intelligible principle on which they were all agreed, and the edifying spectacle was even seen of Mr. Asquith and Mr. Lloyd George looking as pleasant as the circumstances permitted on the same platform. It also gave Mr. Churchill the opportunity of trying his fortunes for the last time as Liberal candidate for an industrial constituency, this time in Leicester. But it was the experience of Dundee over again, except that this time, besides his being assailed with the extraordinary fury his anti-Socialist principles drew upon him from the Left, there was a Conservative to absorb the votes on the Right, and he was left to collect

what he could of the residue. Even his oratorical powers were of little avail against the stentorian, ultra-democratic technique of denying free speech to those deemed unworthy of it; nor had he anything to dangle before the eyes of the non-capitalist, half as attractive as his rival's panacea of a capital levy. In the upshot, Mr. Pethick Lawrence, the Socialist, beat him by just on 4,400 votes, with the Conservative making a close third. It really did look this time like his political quietus. As a Liberal, even in what now appeared the extremely remote contingency of his getting a seat in the House at all, he might wait till doomsday for one in any Cabinet.

Plainly his exit from that blind alley must be effected with the least possible delay. And now events themselves were to provide him with something more than a pretext. For the result of the election had been to arouse the still vigorous Free Trade feeling in the country sufficiently to lose the Conservatives more than a hundred seats, rather more than half of which went to the Liberals, with the result that though still the weakest party in the House, they held the balance between the other two. If they had been wise, even from a party standpoint, they would have refused Mr. Baldwin's gambit by maintaining him in office on their own terms. But Asquith was an old and a party man, and still thought of the Tories as the villains of a Gladstonian melodrama; and therefore, with the willing co-operation of Lloyd George, who had his own score to settle, he made the suicidal blunder of putting the Socialists in office with the support of Liberal votes, thus depriving the Liberals of their last remaining hope in the votes of those political second-class passengers who looked to them for a safe evolutionary alternative to naked reaction.

No longer could it be a case of Churchill rattling on his principles by deserting his party. Now that the Liberals had sold the pass to the Reds, there could be no question, with his known views, of his remaining with them for a moment longer—nor did he. He was now in a position corresponding to that of the Greek "cityless man"—the doors of office, of the Commons, and of all three parties, being firmly banged, barred, and bolted against him. There appeared to be no resource for him but to retire with dignity into private life, and seek what solace he could with his pen and his easel. But no one who knew him could imagine his accepting such a conclusion.

The way he chose was Winstonian in its combination of obviousness with audacity. If he could not get received into any of the three parties, he would form one of his own—a Constitutionalist party. If that word had hitherto been regarded as an equivalent to Conservative—so much the better. He *was* a Conservative, all the more so from being of that progressive type that, as Tennyson had expressed it, "lops the mouldering branch away". He called on the Tories to give Protection a rest, and the Liberals, in effect, to remember that Mr. Gladstone was dead—and on all men of goodwill to sink their party differences and concentrate in unison on stemming the rising flood of Red revolution.

It was not long before chance presented him with the opportunity of giving the most magnificent of all advertisements to this new departure of his. In February 1924, before the new Labour Government had fairly had time to settle down to its precarious existence, the Abbey Division of Westminster, one of the safest Conservative seats in the country, fell vacant. But for all its safety, there was something about a Westminster election peculiarly calculated to focus public attention. Churchill would not have been half a New Yorker, had he failed to exploit such an opportunity to the full. As a first step, he blandly offered himself to the local caucus as Conservative candidate. They hummed and hawed, as well they might over it—they tried to fix conditions; would he engage, as a loyal party man, to abide by their decision whether to stand or not? He was too old a bird to be caught with that lime; and when accordingly they turned him down, in favour of a safe party man, who had qualified for the seat by being a relative of the late Member, he rushed into the lists, unprovided with any sort of official backing or organization, as a Constitutionalist. There followed such an election as Westminster had not known since the days when the beautiful Duchess of Devonshire had bought votes with kisses for Charles James Fox; only this time, besides society ladies, Gaiety girls, and a light-weight boxing champion (this last fortunately in a metaphorical sense only) rushed into the fray on the bold challenger's behalf. The streets in the neighbourhood of St. Stephen's swarmed with celebrities of all kinds, doing their bit for him. The stunt press stunted him for all it was worth. The contest was the sensation of the hour, and he the hero; his official opponent, and two others from the Left who perhaps cherished forlorn hopes of getting in on a split vote, were merely his foils.

What was most important of all was the attitude of Mr. Baldwin, who had of course done the usual and correct thing by sending a letter of support to the official candidate. But Balfour, as one of the exiled elder statesmen of the party, had drafted a similar letter of his own to Churchill, not to be dispatched without the Premier's consent, which was, after some hesitation, granted, Mr. Baldwin being thus in the position of backing the official candidate officially, and giving his opponent an informal leg up. It was not hard to guess what his feelings really were.

But the power and resources of the party machine were applied ruthlessly, and it was too much to expect the last-minute irruption, even of the most brilliant freelance, to have a chance of success among the well-drilled ranks of the Westminster Tories. And yet he came within an ace—within 47 votes to be precise—of bringing it off. It was in keeping with the sensational nature of the whole proceedings that his success should have been prematurely announced, and then denied on a final count. But the most smashing victory could not have served him better than so dazzling a failure. It was no longer a question of whether the Conservatives would take back a

renegade, but of how soon they could enlist the support of the doughtiest champion in the field against the Red menace.

8.

Thus in spite of his having been thrown out of three successive constituencies, Mr. Churchill's seemingly insoluble problem of transition was, in fact, solved; and within a very few weeks he had been quietly and officially adopted as Unionist candidate for the safe constituency of Epping, at the now plainly foreshadowed General Election.

He had not long to wait. Not many months had passed before the Liberals, having earned no thanks or respect from anyone for their experiment of putting the Socialists into power to spite the Tories, were constrained to stultify themselves by turning them out again; and at the subsequent election the wrath of the country was visited upon them far more decisively than upon Labour. They returned a powerless group of some fifty Members, at variance among themselves. Churchill, who had been duly returned by an enormous majority for Epping, must have looked back on his late political home with something of the feelings of Lot, glancing back over his shoulder in the direction of the Dead Sea plain.

He was on the top of the world again; but the best was yet to come when Mr. Baldwin, safely installed in power at the head of the biggest Conservative majority since the Reform Bill, selected him for the key and long-coveted post of Chancellor of the Exchequer. This was a sensational and unexpected move on the part of the restored Premier, and put the crown on a political strategy as daring and successful as any on Parliamentary record. It is the fashion to assume that Mr. Baldwin muddled himself into his undreamed-of victory through sheer fecklessness. Since the secrets of Mr. Baldwin's heart are known only to himself and his Maker, neither of whom is likely to reveal them, all one can say is that whether by luck or cunning, he proceeded accurately move by move to what can only be judged as the ideally correct solution of an extraordinarily difficult and complex problem. And to make sense of the story, it is best to assume that he knew what he was about.

On that assumption he may be judged to have attained not only the chief, but every one of his objects. He had arrested the drift to disaster that was well under way when he had taken over the Premiership; he had inflicted a damaging check on one of the two rival parties, and shattered the other beyond hope of recovery; he had got a clear-cut decision on the question of Protection that allowed him to go to the country without that electoral millstone round his neck; and most important of all, he had weaned the party from the control of its reactionary, or diehard, element, and put it in a way of Tory democracy calculated to secure the lion's share of the

decisive vote set free by the decomposition of Liberalism. And it was here that the lines of Baldwin's political and Churchill's personal strategy drew together and coincided.

Not the least of the Premier's achievement had been to defeat the vendetta of the Blimps against brains, that had barred from office his former colleagues in the Coalition Ministry. He was going to take the field this time as head of a first eleven of his own picking, with Balfour, Birkenhead, Chamberlain, and the rest of them, pulling their full weight. That, after all, was elementary common-sense; but the choice of Churchill, for so many years the *bête noire* of the party, for a position higher than any of theirs—one that so frequently had carried with it the eventual reversion of the Premiership—had something of the unexpectedness of genius. But there could have been no more fitting completion either of a series of blind throws making double sixes each time, or of a consummate work of political art. Not only had Churchill's record proved him to possess, with the possible exception of Lloyd George, incomparably the greatest administrative talent of any living British statesman, but his presence at the Exchequer was the surest guarantee that could have been afforded of Mr. Baldwin's undertaking to put Protection into cold storage at least for the duration of the present Parliament. Nor could any happier combination have been imagined than that between the temperaments of these two Tory democrats, the massive commonsense of the leader, and the less solid brilliance of the second in command.

Let it not be forgotten that we are speaking of the Baldwin, and the Churchill, of the middle 'twenties, and not of the middle 'thirties.

## 9.

It must have rejoiced the new Chancellor's heart to take his father's old robes out of store, and to feel that a second Churchill was now at the Exchequer, with incomparably greater scope and opportunity than could possibly have fallen to the lot of the first. If ever a man had worked up to the post, it was he, for he had now shown his mettle in all the chief martial and domestic offices of state. And to those who doubted his ability to switch over from the process of spending to that of saving money, it might be replied that he had inherited a tradition of economy. And he was now—for his fiftieth birthday had followed hard on his elevation—fairly entitled himself to be numbered in the ranks of the elder statesmen, and might therefore be assumed to have acquired some measure of that *gravitas* without which brilliance in a financier may prove to be more of a liability than an asset.

But it must have been with feelings of some anxiety that his well-wishers awaited his first Budget speech, remembering how those of his predecessors, Gladstone and Lloyd George (to whose names his

father's might easily have made a third), had each marked some great, historic departure in policy with which their names would forever after be associated. Nor could anyone acquainted with his record and disposition have imagined that he would be satisfied on this occasion with anything less.

And the great, variable factor of luck, on which the reputations of even the greatest finance ministers are, in practice, so largely dependent, seemed to be all in his favour. For his thrifty predecessor, Snowden, who, in spite of his representing a Labour government, had produced a Budget in the strictest, Victorian Radical tradition, had bequeathed him a handsome surplus. With this, he first proceeded to reduce the income tax to 4s. in the pound, which, though it would have seemed fantastic before the War, was the lowest to which it was ever destined to fall after it. Having thus lightened the burden of the middle-class taxpayer, who provided the financial backbone of the community, he proceeded further on the path of practical socialism than Labour itself had done, by a comprehensive scheme of Insurance Pensions to widows and orphans, and a great increase and widening of Old Age Pensions, which were now granted, on a contributory basis, at the age of sixty-five, and without any restrictions whatever after seventy. To provide the necessary financial basis for this generosity, he had to reinforce his surplus by certain minor increments of taxation, that he distributed with so cunning a hand that they were hardly felt, except in so far as a duty on real and artificial silk might provide a section of the press with the chance of exploiting a grievance connected with girls' legs. But this, like all similar stunts, was discarded as soon as it had exhausted its power as a reaction stimulus.

Here was no isolated *tour de force*, but a grand strategic approach to prosperity of which this was the opening move. For Churchill, true to his father's tradition, pledged himself in advance to a course of progressive economy, by which he proposed to cut down expenditure at the rate of £10,000,000 a year, thus setting his hands free for further reliefs and benefits, to be conferred in the four subsequent Budgets on which, thanks to Mr. Baldwin's majority, he could reasonably count.

Here to start with was a Budget that seemed fully entitled to rank with the most epochal in Parliamentary record, and taken in conjunction with Austen Chamberlain's achievement in bringing together France and Germany at Locarno, might have afforded some plausible excuse for believing that 1925 might mark the beginning of an era, at home and abroad, in which, the new world order of peaceful co-operation having been ordered and settled on the best and surest foundations, the peace so long in suspense might at last be regarded as won.

But Mr. Churchill's most direct contribution to the new world order was not contained in his Budget. For there is a foreign as well as a domestic policy in finance, and for a nation like Britain, which

must starve unless she can get the foreigner to feed her, in return for goods and services rendered, the foreign aspect is fundamental. Any order of prosperity for her must be a world order. And what she has of all other things to dread is a reign of no order at all, but of chaos and uncertainty in which no man can trust his fellow to honour a bargain, or if he does, not to swindle him by paying in false coin. And it was just such an international anarchy that the War had left in its wake. Unless, therefore, Mr. Churchill could contribute substantially towards reducing this chaos to order, nothing that the most consummate financial genius could effect in his Budget could stand between the country and ruin.

He had his contribution to make, and it was this; he put the pound sterling back on the gold standard. He undertook, that is to say, that every pound's worth of government paper should be exchangeable for a pound's worth of gold.

Now that sounds simple and plain-sailing enough; and so, in fact, it is, when the issue is not befogged by the jargon and abracadabra of materialist mysticism, masquerading under the guise of economic science. Human standards of any kind are the product not of blind forces, but of souls. Regarded from this viewpoint, the gold standard might be defined as an attempt to put the golden rule on a business footing; and we might speak of a gold standard nation, as one that sweareth to a neighbour and disappointeth him not, though it were to its own hindrance. Whether the same object might not be even more effectively compassed by fixing on some other unit than gold, is a technical point of no vital moment. The principle at stake is clear—it is a standard of honesty that is required, to put a stop to a habit of universal sharp practice and bad faith by which all confidence and therefore willingness to trade is undermined.

That would have been clear enough to people in the good old days when needy monarchs resorted to the comparatively straightforward expedient of debasing their own coinages. You know where you are, and perhaps what to do, with a man who gives you tin for silver. But when money is no longer coined but printed, and signifies no more than a debt of public honour, it becomes possible to manipulate or lower its real value, and thus to bilk creditors, to any extent, without the victim realizing to what extent, or how, he is being cheated. And in all nations, not excluding the British, the War had been financed to a greater or less degree by this simple process of borrowing in honest and paying back in debased money. And recently this had been carried to fantastic lengths, beyond the control of the governments themselves, until it had produced such fearful results as the collapse of the mark in Germany, and a state of things in other countries in which no man could feel secure of his own savings, still less of any foreigner's intention to honour a bargain for a moment longer than it suited him.

Now the Baldwin-Churchill partnership was prepared to stake everything on its faith that for Britain, at anyrate, honesty was the



best and only policy, even in finance. But that, translated into post-war terms, was an even harder saying than it is under normal conditions. For it involved the acceptance of this, among other concrete propositions: that Britain, having burdened herself with a crushing war debt to the United States, would discharge it to the last penny, though all her own creditors, who owed her twice as much, defaulted in a body. And it was this fact of the American debt that was making it as certain as anything human could be that any political or economic reconstruction of international society would start with such a fatal bias, that it could end in no other way than a universal crash. For though Britain was prepared to cancel all her own debts as proof of a general forgiveness, and in any case to collect no more of them than was needed to square her American account, she was coldly referred in New York to what was nominated in the bond, and given to understand in Paris that the honour of an ally did not extend to the payment of a sou that could not first be screwed out of the late enemy. And since the German position was that blood could not—or at least would not—be got out of a stone, it followed that America herself had to provide the money, in the form of loans to Germany, for the payment of her own debts at two removes, thus setting up the most crazy and vicious financial circle ever known, and keeping open the gaping wound of an indemnity in Germany's side. And since the bond nominated payment in gold, the gold standard for Britain became not only the means, but the necessary price of honesty.

Churchill's resumption of the gold standard might therefore be taken as a grand gesture and example of righteous dealing in the sight of the whole world. The reputation of the pound sterling as the most reliable medium of exchange ever known, would be dramatically vindicated, and it would become a sort of rallying point for international confidence. No more solid contribution could be imagined to the great policy of resettlement, abroad and at home, to which the new Government was committed. That was how, one imagines, he must have figured it out\* and how it did, in fact, appear to all but a very few critics at the time. Never had his reputation stood so high as it did in the summer of 1925; never since the War had there been such an atmosphere of public optimism. Men for the first time began to look forward to the future with something like confidence, and dream dreams of a new era of peaceful prosperity. And if there were one or two clouds still left in the wake of the storm, might it not be reasonably assumed that they too would soon be blown off the sky with the barometer thus rising?

And this reasoning would have been perfectly sound, given anything like normal conditions. When a man has shattered his constitution and ruined his nerves, the best advice he can receive is

\* Unless, to take another possible theory, he allowed his own financial judgment to be overborne by the urgency of the banking magnates. But for this we must await his own elucidation.

normally to submit himself to a regimen of strict temperance and healthy living, in order to nurse himself back to his pre-riotous condition. But how if there should turn out to be something organically wrong with him? How if Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Churchill should be in the position of having to prescribe a health cure to a patient suffering from a malignant tumour? How if the problem they were called on to solve should turn out to be not a national but a world problem, and as such insoluble by any conceivable means at their disposal?

One thing is certain—public opinion would follow the example of those oriental despots, who judged their physicians by results, and made it a capital offence not to have effected a cure under any circumstances whatever.

## 10.

The summer of 1925 had not passed before the bright hopes excited by Mr. Churchill's Budget had already begun to be clouded over. It was evident that the programme he had mapped out of progressive recuperation depended for its success on one vital condition, that of peace, both at home and abroad. Convalescence, whether of men or of nations, pre-supposes quiet. But it was only too evident that a social crisis of the first magnitude was boiling up—perhaps even a social revolution.

The seat of the trouble was in the coal industry, in which conditions were hardest, and the spirit, both of employers and men, even harder. Already, four years before, a strike of the miners had only been prevented, at the last moment, and to their bitter indignation, from developing into a general strike. And now, in these summer months, conditions in the industry took a catastrophic turn; in May its unemployment figures had risen to just short of 200,000; by June they had topped the 300,000.

It was at least unfortunate for Churchill that this sensational increase should have taken place just after he had put Britain on to the gold standard, and might have suggested something more than a coincidence. For the effect of adopting an honest currency does undoubtedly tend to put a country's trade at a certain disadvantage, compared with those of less scrupulous neighbours who, by debasing theirs, contrive to cut the prices of their goods in the foreign market; for it is no doubt possible to dope export trade by debasing currency. And it may be that the slight upward tilt imparted to British prices abroad may have had a certain, though not very obviously perceptible, effect in aggravating an already grave situation.

But to talk of the depression in the coal industry as if it were wholly, or mainly, the effect of the gold standard, is to use the language of unplausible exaggeration, since it weighed equally on every coal-producing country in Europe, and was no more than one would expect to result from the gradual supersession of the steam

by the internal-combustion engine. The Royal Commission that reported in the following March, put the case in its true perspective by concluding that though the return to gold might have had some temporary ill effect, it had ceased to be of primary importance.

The attempt to make Churchill into the villain of the piece, the man who, according to the popular *cliché*, had nailed his country to a cross of gold, is thus, to put it mildly, disingenuous. But whether it was his fault or not, a train of consequences had been set in motion that spelt ruin to the high hopes with which he had started this latest phase of his ministerial career. The dream of a peaceful and prosperous evolution within the framework of the existing social order was destined to be rudely, and deliberately, shattered. And from the miner's point of view, it may perhaps have seemed as if a social order that could afford him the prospect of no better conditions than he at present enjoyed, was not worth preserving at the price of even longer hours and lower wages for a job that he would be lucky to get at all. That was certainly the view impressed upon him by his leaders, the most dynamic of whom, Arthur Cook, was an avowed disciple of Lenin and, as such, presumably out for nothing less than Red revolution, of the deepest Bolshevik dye. But that, from Churchill's standpoint, constituted the abomination of desolation against which he had warned his countrymen, and towards which his attitude was one of mortal hostility. Once battle was joined against that enemy, every other consideration, even of economy and sound finance, would have to give way to that of beating him.

But so long as there was any chance of peace, there was hardly any sacrifice that Mr. Baldwin, at least, was not prepared to make. Accordingly when, on the last day of July, the deadlock between the miners and the owners had brought the country to the brink of the General Strike, he purchased a nine months' armistice, by allowing the coal industry to keep up wages and profits at the expense of the whole community. This, reckoned to the end of April, involved an indemnity of 23 millions, for which Mr. Churchill had to rifle the pockets of the taxpayer. It came to more than two and a quarter times the amount that, by the most sedulous cheese-paring, he had reckoned on saving in each single year—already a crippling blow to his carefully thought out plan of financial strategy. It was the Munich of the industrial war.

Only the most sanguine of optimists could have imagined that, even with the help of a Royal Commission to act as impartial umpire, the high contending parties would make the slightest real effort to compose their differences on any other basis than that of the tribute being made a permanent charge on the community, a solution that would soon equally have commended itself to every other hard-pressed industry and, with mechanical certainty, have sent the pound careering after the mark and the rouble. Come what might, after April the mining industry must find its own way of salvation.

out of its own resources. But failing that, the Government had one more string to its bow. The nine months' respite was not only a breathing space for the settlement of peace, but also of preparation for war. The General Strike, if it had come at the beginning of August, would have found the authorities completely unprepared, and nothing would have prevented the country from being plunged into a chaos from which none would have suffered more tragically than the workers themselves. Now, if the worst should come to the worst, it would find the Government with its plans worked out to the last detail for keeping the community from being starved or paralyzed into submission.

Meanwhile Mr. Churchill could do no more than mark time in his second Budget. The subsidy had swallowed up any surplus he might have had for the development of his social reform policy, and the only novel feature in his finance was an attempt to square accounts by forcing the betting industry to contribute a moiety of its takings to the revenue, a move that was violently opposed by those religious purists to whom betting was so accursed a thing as to be officially non-existent, and therefore tax free.

The fateful May Day approached without the faintest sign of any peaceful issue from the deadlock. Mr. Cook and his fellow extremists had nailed the red flag to the mast with the slogan of "not a minute on the day, not a penny off the pay", which reduced the proposals of the Commission for a compromise to so much waste paper. The Trades Union Council, which included the leader and leading magnates of the Labour Party, were horrified at the turn things had taken, and were hardly less anxious to find a way of escape from the General Strike than the Government itself, but they were pitifully helpless against the inflamed team spirit that would have branded any failure to back the miners in their most revolutionary demands, with the stigma of treason. Nevertheless they continued to negotiate desperately with the Government up to the very last moment, hoping against hope to find any alternative to launching the thunderbolt that had been thrust into their reluctant hands. But the only settlement that stood the remotest chance of getting accepted was that of a renewed Danegeld, and against that the Government was adamant.

And it was not only the Labour leaders who were under the compulsion of their extremists. For now that the T.U.C. had been forced to give orders (that there was still time to cancel) for the General Strike to start on the morning of Tuesday, May 4, a war party had formed in the Cabinet itself, that could not brook the idea of continuing negotiations after this formal declaration of war, and whose members were threatening to resign and split the Government. When this, like most other Cabinet secrets, first began to leak out, it was taken as a matter of course that the leading spirit of their group had—and in fact must have—been Churchill himself, whose pugnacious temperament and intransigent anti-socialism were of

common knowledge. But a little further reflection might have shown how extremely unlikely he, of all men, would have been to accept a conclusion that spelt frustration and ruin to all those high hopes with which he started his keepership of the nation's purse. It was not he who was behind this stand against appeasement, but, to quote the words of an account of the Strike that came out shortly after it, "Mr. Neville Chamberlain, the Minister of Health, the ablest administrator in the Cabinet, but a man of hard, unyielding temper".\*

But so notorious was the desire of the political chiefs on both sides for a peaceful settlement, and so strenuously did the Trades Union leaders continue to go backwards and forwards between the Government and the Miners' leaders until late on Sunday night, trying to find some basis for at least a postponement of hostilities, that it came as a stunning blow to those who had sat up till after midnight with their wireless tuned in, to be informed, at one in the morning, that the Government had abruptly and finally broken off negotiations, and that the thing so long and so greatly feared was actually upon them.

The actual *casus belli* was the refusal of the printing staff of *The Daily Mail*, an organ which, ironically enough, was at the time almost as hostile to Mr. Baldwin as to Mr. Cook himself, to set up a leading article of which they disapproved. This open, though unauthorized act of war—and one of such unprecedented implications—was too much for the war party, which now appears to have got a majority in the Cabinet. Mr. Baldwin, faced with the immediate disruption of his Government, could no longer hold out against the strong line of least resistance. Without even giving the horrified Labour leaders the chance to repudiate this act of indiscipline, the ministers shut up shop and went home to bed, having decided to negotiate no more until the Strike orders were unconditionally revoked.

Nevertheless, in the tragic debate which took place in the Commons on the following day, in which the leaders on both sides were like men stretching out vain hands across a chasm that had suddenly opened between them, it was Churchill who afforded a gleam of hope, by announcing that the door to a settlement was still open. This was eagerly responded to by the Railwaymen's ultra-pacifist leader, Mr. Thomas, and led to a hurried conference in a room behind the Speaker's chair. But it was too late—that door had been rudely banged, and the extremists, diehard and Marxian, had their united backs against it.

Mr. Churchill's sole responsibility, like Mr. Baldwin's, for the outbreak of these ruinous hostilities, had lain in his inability to prevent them. But once battle had been joined, there was no mistake about his attitude. He became the fighting man he had been from his youth up, without any thought of compromise, and with all his energies bent to the one end of victory. He was no more in doubt

\* *Strike Fortnight*, pubd. by *The Daily News*, p. 8.

than he had been in the war against Germany, of the righteousness of his cause, or the supreme importance of the issue at stake. This, to his mind at any rate, was no mere industrial dispute, but as he himself put it, "a strike to starve the nation into submission" and set up "some soviet of the Trades Unions on which . . . the real effective control of the political and economic life would devolve", in short, "a conflict which, if fought out to a conclusion, could only end in the overthrow of Parliamentary government or its decisive victory."

But it was not only in the physical sense that the Strike programme envisaged the starvation of the country. Another means of coercion, of more ominous import, consisted in the attempt to suppress every newspaper and magazine, with the exception of one solitary paper run by the strikers themselves, and entirely devoted to their propaganda. It was an application of the new, Totalitarian technique that was already familiar in Italy and Russia, but had certainly never been dreamed of in England.

Now it was by this attack on the freedom of the press that, as Churchill's strategic eye was quick to perceive, the enemy had exposed himself to a deadly counter-stroke. And it was one that he, with his journalistic experience, was of all the ministerial team best fitted to launch. So without the least hesitation he seconded himself from the Exchequer to take command on the press front. His plan was to choke the strike leaders with their own medicine; to run a rival paper devoted to anti-strike propaganda, and with himself as editor in chief, using all the resources at the Government's disposal, and calling upon the willing aid that he was certain to receive from the best brains in Fleet Street. The Brass Hats of the profession, in the shape of the Association of Newspaper Proprietors, assured him that it couldn't be done—he knew better. It was a glorious adventure, of the kind in which he had always revelled; he was as happy as any of those cheery young men—"scabs in Oxford bags" as one strike leader called them—who were realizing the dreams of their nursery days by functioning as real engine-drivers. It is probable that even his will to victory was swallowed up in the sheer delight of bringing off the greatest newspaper stunt on British record.

Before his tempestuous energy, all obstacles gave way. The ultra-Tory *Morning Post* placed its entire resources at his disposal; his trusty friend Lord Beaverbrook lent him the services of the most brilliant technicians on the staff of his *Daily Express*; armies of enthusiastic volunteers were at hand to rush copies by motor to every part of the country. He himself, in his new headquarters, was kept working with tireless energy to make everything go with a zip worthy of a Northcliffe or a Hearst. And so it did; for the circulation of *The British Gazette* soon mounted to figures unprecedented in the records of journalism. The poor *British Worker*, the strike paper, faded out of the picture. It devoted itself, with meticulous assiduity, to answering whatever appeared in *The Gazette*. But *The Gazette* did not trouble to answer *The Worker*, but just went on as if it didn't exist.

Which shows that in journalistic craft Fleet Street had nothing to teach Mr. Churchill.

As those who had gone about to muzzle the press did not fail to point out, the methods of *The British Gazette* were marked by none of that judicial impartiality that is expected of government organs. They were frankly and unashamedly propagandist. The prime object of the paper was not to impart knowledge or uplift, but to achieve victory. This was Total War—and it was not Churchill who had started it on the press front. But once started, he was nothing loath to wage it. He perhaps remembered the brazen rule of Northcliffe, "the power of the press is to suppress". He applied this power to snuff out even the Archbishop of Canterbury, when that well-intentioned prelate endeavoured to cut in with the somewhat naïve suggestion that the Government should buy off the Strike by another instalment of the subsidy. Even *The Times*, which throughout contrived to maintain its reputation for dignified impartiality, was not unnaturally aggrieved to find its supplies of paper commandeered for the replenishment of this upstart rival. But in fighting revolution—for this was certainly how Churchill regarded it—one must employ all means, to give the enemy as good as one gets and a bit better in the same coin.

And there was this further advantage that Churchill had over the leaders of the T.U.C. He was all out to win, and they were not even out to fight. Few of them were of the stuff of which revolutionaries are made. They had been dragged into the business against their wills, were thoroughly out of sympathy with the methods they were constrained to employ, and were looking for an excuse to break the yoke of Mr. Cook, and be done with this, and all other General Strikes. They had no stomach for such hard pounding as this of Churchill's, and the success of *The Gazette* was not the least of the factors that drove them to an undignified and unconditional surrender. As a feat of inspired improvisation, even his career can hardly show anything to equal it. His fifty-one years had done nothing to suppress the undying schoolboy in him. It had been magnificent fun while it had lasted. Now it was over, it would be time to reckon up the cost.

## II.

If the Trades Union chiefs had been possessed of a Machiavellian foresight very foreign to their real nature, they might have reflected, as they went to eat humble pie at Downing Street, that he laughs best who laughs last. For their defeat had not only given them some chance of being masters in their own house, but it had dealt a mortal blow at the ostensible victors. Most of all had it been ruinous to the fortunes of their most bitter and formidable opponent.

For the peace in his time at the Exchequer, on which all Mr. Churchill's carefully laid schemes had depended, had been irrepar-

ably shattered. Even if the calling off of the General Strike had brought a clear-cut decision, it might not have been so bad. He himself, putting the most cheerful face upon it he could, announced that the direct cost to the State had not been more than three-quarters of a million, and that there was no need for additional taxation. But the conflict was not over, or nearly over. The miners, with indomitable heroism or pig-headedness, according to the point of view, were merely infuriated at being left in the lurch, and were even more determined, as it proved, to stand upon the last letter of their demands, and stick it out to the bitter end, than Mr. Cook himself. And so instead of the Trades Unions starving the country out, there commenced the long-drawn, miserable tragedy of the miners starving themselves, or being starved, out—again according to the point of view. But the merits of the dispute were neither here nor there, when it became a question of casting up the accounts. Almost till the end of the year this unnatural war of attrition dragged its slow length along. Poor Churchill could only sit still and watch the wealth on which he had counted for national recuperation being poured down the drain. He himself at one point tried his persuasive talents in the capacity of mediator, but he might as well have argued with a bulldog to let go his grip as with either masters or men to make the least concession. It is no wonder that in the autumn he was fain to turn his back on the sorry prospect, and seek to forget it for awhile amid the timeless grandeur of the Pyramids, and in contact with the not quite so timeless grandeur of the new Cæsar at Rome.

One thing was certain; no allowance would be made for the adverse circumstances that, through no fault of his own, had weighed the odds so hopelessly against him. It was no longer a question of his following up his first Budget with others in which fresh benefits should be conferred and burdens lightened; it would require something like genius to maintain things at their existing level. His 1927 Budget was a marvel of financial juggling, by which he managed to plug up the gaping deficit bequeathed by the Strike without any major or ostensible increase in taxation. He allowed the income-tax payer to keep at the 4-shilling level by touching him for both his half-yearly instalments at one go; and he raided that convenient victim, the road fund, for a further substantial amount, no doubt on the principle that payment to the garage proprietor is more gladly borne than that to the tax-gatherer.

Never, in fact, had his resource and indomitable spirit been more in evidence than in his struggle to get back the national finances on to the rising curve of prosperity with which he had started. In his next Budget, he not only managed to introduce concessions to the tune of over 4 millions, but he also put before the country a most comprehensive and ambitious scheme for the relief of local rates—in his inevitable military style he announced that he was marching with every man, horse, and gun, to the relief of British industry;



a somewhat grandiose way of describing a series of complicated readjustments that it took him three and a half hours to expound—which even with half an hour for rest and refreshment in the middle, counted for a heroic exhibition of oratorical stamina, though no Victorian statesman would have thought anything of it, least of all Lord Palmerston, who once held the House spellbound, without any pause at all, from the dusk of one midsummer day to the dawn of another. But ingenious though this derating scheme was, its benefits were too indirect to redound very much to its author's personal kudos, and coming into operation, as it did, on the eve of the Great Slump, it soon faded out of the popular consciousness altogether. He was in the middle of one of those runs of persistent bad luck against which no human contrivance can avail. There are some lines on which it would seem as if a man's own destiny rides him for a fall.

None the less, he continued game to the end of the course. His last Budget contrived to embody a dramatic feature, happily timed for the eve of an election, in the repeal of the tea duty, that chronic bugbear of the poor man's breakfast table:

And it don't seem right to me  
That a man should pay a penn'orth of tax  
For drinking a penn'orth of tea.

But the poor man was not to be cozened with tea out of his resentment against Mr. Baldwin's Government for its part in the great Labour defeat in 1926; and the appeal to the constituencies resulted in what was rather a severe setback than a defeat, with the two main parties so evenly matched that it was again possible for the Liberal remnant to hold the balance between them. And Labour, confronted with the same choice as in 1924, allowed the same poisoned chalice to be handed to it, and took office without power, a decision so fraught with disaster that at least one Left-Wing historian has assumed the election itself to have been rigged, with accurate foreknowledge of the sequel, by the super-subtle capitalists! So that Churchill was again out of office, though this time there was no question of his being out of Parliament. Epping Toryism could be warranted pendulum proof.

But it was his third, and this time looked like being his final fall. His Chancellorship had ended under a cloud. It was assumed, even in friendly circles, that he had been the wrong man for the job, and he was judged by his signal failure to realize the hopes that he himself had encouraged on his assumption of office. That he might have been the victim of circumstances beyond his control was not considered. On the contrary, there was a tendency to make his resumption of the gold standard the sufficient explanation for everything that had gone wrong since. This most of all appealed to that overwhelming majority of the public who had scarcely the vaguest notion of what the gold standard was, or how it actually worked.

It had become, in fact, a safe lead to treat Churchill as a fit subject for biographical debunking, and indeed one enterprising author actually seized the occasion to get in with a substantial volume, published in 1931, on *The Tragedy of Winston Churchill*,\* for "what has been Mr. Churchill's career", he asks, "... but the tragedy of the brilliant failure, who has repeatedly seen men whom he despises pass him on the road to office and power?"

"And what", the merciless enquiry proceeds, "is to be Winston Churchill's future? Will he reach his real goal, which is to be Prime Minister?" This the tragedian answers with a restrained irony of understatement, "One feels doubtful."

The intelligent reader could safely be trusted—in 1931—to feel more than doubtful.

## VIII

### THE VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

#### I.

ABOUT THIS third fall of Churchill there was a new feature that might have strengthened the conviction that this time he really was, politically speaking, a finished man. Hitherto he had never failed in his flair for seeing the game a number of moves ahead, and shaping his course accordingly. His abandonment of the Conservatives in 1904, and even more astonishing adroitness in effecting his return in 1924, had been sheer masterpieces of political technique. In fact he would seem to have resembled one of those Japanese tumblers which however hard or headlong you throw them down, cannot be kept from resuming an upright position.

But now it was as if this old faculty of his had mysteriously departed from him. He no longer evinced that infallible instinct for doing the politically right thing, and, in fact, seemed to have developed a capacity for doing the exact opposite. After all, his game was not such a very difficult one to play. He had had no sort of ostensible quarrel or friction with Baldwin; he still might be presumed to retain his place, along with Austen Chamberlain, at the head of the elder statesmen under the ex-Premier. And it would have required less than his political acumen to have foreseen the triumphant return of the Conservatives to power, as soon as the Liberals had paid out enough rope to the new Labour Government or it to hang itself; and then he might have counted on coming back, not perhaps to the Exchequer, but certainly to one of the great offices of state. All he had to do was to sit tight on the Opposi-

\* By Victor Wallace Germain.

tion front bench in his capacity of loyal Conservative, making himself indispensable with his unrivalled powers of attacking oratory. And perhaps also, if his eye for future possibilities had been as keen as in the past, he would have done all he could to avoid creating any irreparable breach with those Labour chiefs whose gravitation, like that of Baldwin himself, was so notoriously towards the centre.

But instead of this, he went deliberately and ostentatiously out of his way to create such a breach as would make his return to office, in a Baldwin government, unthinkable. The occasion for this was afforded by the active steps that were being taken, under the auspices of the new Premier, Ramsay MacDonald, to prepare for the grant of the largest possible measure of self-government to India. But this policy was also notoriously that of the Viceroy, Lord Irwin—the present Lord Halifax, who though the most Liberal-minded holder of that office since Lord Ripon, was also an unexceptionable and high Tory, and enjoyed the intimate sympathy and support of his fellow Tory-Liberal, Stanley Baldwin. Now Lord Irwin had committed two mortal crimes in the eyes of Winston Churchill. He had publicly intimated, with the full endorsement of the new Government, that the goal of the proposed new Constitution would be the grant of full Dominion Status to India at the earliest possible date. And in his search for a settlement founded upon the indispensable basis of Indian goodwill, he had taken the unprecedented course, for a Viceroy, of getting into personal and intimate touch with the nationalist and—from the British official standpoint—actively seditious Hindu leader, Mahatma Gandhi.

These, though included in the same indictment, are in fact charges of a very different nature. Dominion Status was one of those verbal smoke-screens only too characteristic of post-war mentality; by which some very alarming and unpleasant reality is insinuated under cover of some high and innocent-sounding verbiage. What it actually meant was nothing more nor less than the right of any Indian Government to walk out of the Empire; and India, after the grant of the proposed democratic constitution, would mean, for purposes of secession, the caucus of politically minded Hindu "congress-wallahs", openly and bitterly anti-British, who would be bound to get into power on a majority vote in a country the vast majority of whose inhabitants were incapable of conceiving the meaning of a vote, except as a marketable commodity. The result would be wantonly to plunge back India into the blood-bath of racial and religious anarchy from which British rule had rescued her, and to set up an unspeakable tyranny, or complex of tyrannies, under the name of freedom. It would also amount to the *felo de se* of the British Empire, with the ruin of all that the Empire meant for civilization.

This, though I have put it in my own words, would, I trust, be accepted by Mr. Churchill as a fair summary of his views on Dominion Status; and it may be taken, even by those who do not

share his point of view, as an honest man's reaction against a sham—for it could not be seriously presumed that Lord Irwin, or even Mr. MacDonald, meant to accept the conclusions to which their loose and flabby verbiage committed them, and to which they would infallibly be held down by interested parties.

But the censure of Lord Irwin's advances to Mahatma Gandhi was on a somewhat different footing. For it was not only a maganimous but a statesmanlike impulse that impelled the Viceroy to try at least to find some common ground of understanding with this extraordinary personage, who had succeeded in impressing so many millions of his fellow countrymen as an almost divine figure, both the saviour and the symbol of their ancient civilization. Lord Irwin happened to be peculiarly fitted for this task; since he harked back to that ancient tradition which identifies Torvism with High Churchmanship, though of a very different brand from the High and Dry vintage of the Restoration, or of good Queen Anne's day. He approached the Mahatma therefore from the standpoint not only of a gentleman but a Christian, and in that capacity achieved something that bore at least the semblance of a personal conquest. The two were even said to have wandered frequently away from the realms of statesmanship into those of theology, and it is surely a touching picture, of His Majesty's stately representative in earnest discussion with the plain-clad ascetic, over the correct interpretation, according to the Greek original, of some text in St. John's Gospel.

But this is not the way that the spectacle appealed to Winston Churchill. "It is alarming and nauseating", he said, "to see Mr. Gandhi, a seditious Middle Temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a type well known in the East, striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceregal palace, while he is still organizing and conducting a campaign of civil disobedience, to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King Emperor." That is language that we should rather expect from some burning-visaged "Qua Hi", holding forth over his chota peg in the sahibs' club, than from the magnanimous statesman and man of letters whose career we have followed. And this notwithstanding a certain element of truth in the indictment; for in Gandhi's strange and complex personality there is something of the lawyer politician as well as of the saint. But to see *only* that aspect is spiritual colour blindness.

It is a deficiency however that Churchill shares in what he would certainly claim as goodly company.\* It is the way in which Macaulay and Kipling, from their widely separated standpoints, agreed in regarding India—as the home of backward and mentally inferior peoples on whom it is the sacred and profitable duty of the white man to confer, willy nilly, the blessings of civilized control. For them the idea of Hindu civilization, as something more ancient

\* And it is only fair to add that the Mahatma's subsequent record might be pleaded as some excuse for regarding him as an irreconcilable malignant, from the British standpoint.

and in some ways more profound than that of its conquerors, is simply unintelligible, and in such a scheme of things there is no place for a Gandhi except as a seditious rebel. And we must remember that Churchill's Indian experience was acquired as a subaltern in those Roaring 'Nineties when the Kiplingese fever was at its height, and the glamour of India invested the figure of the turbaned sowar, while that of the gaunt and austere holy man appealed merely to a sense of condescending humour.

It seems a pity, though, that these two great men, of such contrasting kinds of greatness, should have been parted by so impassable a gulf. The Mahatma himself would gladly have assayed the crossing, and on his visit to England in 1930, longed for an opportunity to make personal contact; but whatever the Viceroy might do, Churchill was not going to have any truck with secessionists, half naked or otherwise. Mr. Gandhi, it is said, had one moment of jubilation when a card was handed him bearing the name of Churchill, but his hopes were dashed when it turned out to be not Winston, but his son Randolph, who was commencing journalist, and sought for a professional interview.\*

But these are controversial issues about which every man has a right to his own opinion; here we are merely concerned to understand what Mr. Churchill was driving at in this sudden incursion into a sphere in which he had not hitherto displayed any special interest. To a second Machiavelli, were such a one to write the political history of our times, the explanation would be transparently obvious. This inveterate careerist, having risen to so high a position in the party through the good offices of Mr. Baldwin, was now making a bid for the Premiership in the next Conservative Government, and was resolved to get rid of his chief as Lloyd George had got rid of Asquith, and Bonar Law had got rid of Lloyd George. By raising the cry of the British Raj in danger he would rally to himself all that stolid, diehard core of the party, to whom Baldwin's coquettings with Liberal principles had been anathema. There would perhaps be another Carlton House meeting, and another purge of leaders, and Churchill would bring back the party to power on a hundred per cent. anti-Socialist and imperialist ticket, with no nonsense about it.

Those who like to accept such an interpretation of his motives can do so, for there is no way of disproving it. But we should be more than ever faced with the difficulty of accounting for such a sudden collapse of his hitherto unflinching political sense and prescience. Apart from the fact that his own record would have rendered his appearance at the head of the stern, unbending Diehards an unseemly jest, his own stock was not standing high enough at the moment to render it likely that the Conservatives would dethrone Stanley to make Winston King!

It seems much more in keeping with what we know both of his

\* *The Tragedy of Gandhi*, by Glorney Bolton, p. 262.

personality and his subsequent proceedings, that he had thrown in his hand because the game of practical politics, as it was played between the three parties, had ceased to interest him. For thirty years now he had played it with consummate success, but there comes a time when even the most exciting game begins to pall, and one realizes that the game is not the real thing. He must have remembered the occasion when poor old Campbell Bannerman had so far forgotten himself, in replying to Balfour's brilliant dialectics, as to burst out with, "Enough of this foolery!" It was with something of the same feeling that he seems to have reacted to the high-sounding platitudes of the political leaders in this test case of India; and it would seem to have revealed to him something fundamentally wrong in the whole way of thought that thus took words for things, and would sign away an empire as light-heartedly as a man putting his signature to some dishonest lawyer's document that he has not even troubled to read.

If it brought him into association, for a moment, with a group of retired officers and administrative reactionaries whose united brain-power was so palpably less than his own, it was but a temporary and accidental conjunction. He himself did not make any ostensible attempt to follow it up by running himself for the Premiership in the capacity of a second Bonar Law. What he did was decisively to break with Baldwin and his Shadow Cabinet, and thus to abandon that last haven in which there remained an anchorage for him. It was political suicide. But it may have been the beginning of life on another and a loftier plane.

## 2.

It was high time. For now reality was beginning to knock on the door with thunderous insistence. Even before Churchill had left office, the first tremors were perceptible of the earthquake that was to bring the crazy edifice designed at Versailles and completed at Locarno toppling about its architects' ears. The American investors suddenly lost confidence in the process of ladling out money to Germany to pay their own debt. They stopped lending, the Germans stopped paying, and then everything seemed to collapse at once, and the whole of Europe and America to be sliding into ruin. The unhappy Ramsay MacDonald, with his hands tied, found himself called upon to cope with a situation that might have been too much for the strongest statesman at the head of the most powerful government. In 1931 it seemed as if Britain herself were on the verge of bankruptcy; and the prospect of the pound sterling, which Churchill had put on to gold, being forced off, was viewed with greater alarm in the country than was excited, nine years later, by the imminent threat of invasion. The Labour Government, distracted and divided, was only too glad to depart and give place to what was intended to be a ministry of national concentration, under the ostensible Premier-

ship of Mr. MacDonald, but the actual control of Mr. Baldwin, with the immediate task of saving the pound.

The pound was not saved, though:—

What gave rise to no little surprise  
Nobody seemed a penny the worse,

least of all the new Government, which received a verdict of overwhelming endorsement from the country. The mood of the electorate was best expressed by one gallant Admiral who, standing as a National candidate, roared out from the platform his intention of giving politics the hell of a kick in the pants. And this was what the average voter, who was sick and tired of the political game, doubtless flattered himself that he had done, when the results were declared.

Mr. Baldwin and the Conservative Central Office probably knew better; for they had scored the most overwhelming party triumph in the history of the game, and one that had thoroughly vindicated Baldwin's intuitive grasp of Lord Randolph Churchill's strategy of combining the Tory and the democratic principles. And it cannot be denied that the new Government acted with vigour and decision in arresting what, quite apart from the fate of the pound, was really a drift towards bankruptcy; though in the process of squaring accounts by ferocious economies, it put so dangerous a strain on the social system as actually to precipitate a mutiny in the fleet.

But the outstanding feature of what set out to be a ministry of all the talents, was its failure to include the most conspicuous talent of all. Mr. Churchill might be returned by an overwhelming majority as the Conservative representative of Epping, but there was no place for him in however camouflaged a Conservative Government. Whatever had been the intention of his Indian mutiny, there was no doubt in what light it had been regarded by Mr. Baldwin, who was not the man to forgive or forget an attempt to engineer a diehard conspiracy against his leadership. And as for the Premier, his sensitive pride had been mortally affronted by the fact that Churchill had pilloried him as "the boneless wonder".

There could be no reasonable doubt about it—Winston Churchill was out of the political game for good and all. He was fifty-seven now, and would be well on in the sixties before there could be the remotest chance of the MacDonald-Baldwin combination being shifted. He had cut himself off from every party connection except that with Tory diehards, who had almost ceased to be regarded in anything but a humorous light by public opinion. The unregretted collapse of the pound had saddled him with the blame for an economic Gallipoli in having put the country on to the gold standard. And what made his return more improbable than ever was that the whole trend of public opinion was decisively against him. People thought of him as a militarist, naked and unashamed—it was in that capacity that Mr. H. G. Wells had pilloried him in one of the most striking

of his romances *à clef*. And the sentiment of the country was passionately and almost unanimously pacifist. The ordinary Englishman was not only determined that he would never go to war, but also that he would not think of war, or prepare for war, or allow anyone to harrow his feelings by talking of war—unless of course the League of Nations were to start a war to prevent war, which would not count. So Mr. Churchill was likely to be as popular with his military scaremongering, as one who should insist on firing off bawdy stories at a mothers' meeting.

There was, in fact, no place for him, or for such as he, in the English political drama of the nineteen-thirties. If he could have retrieved his third fall by a third return to power, it would have been far worse than useless. The country was not ready for his leadership. And—what matters more—he was not ready to lead the country.

In the wise old legends, the deliverer has to make his descent into the underworld, and die to be reborn. Churchill himself, as we know, has always had a faith in an over-ruling Providence that has him in its special care. Let us suppose for a moment that some such Power really did exist, with the foreknowledge that some day he would be the man upon whose adequacy, in the supreme crisis of its fate, the future of human civilization would depend. Is it not to be believed that such a Power, having made him serve the most comprehensive apprenticeship in action that could conceivably be compressed into the span of half a century, should then, in its wisdom, assign him ten years out of the hurly-burly, to regroup his forces and fortify his soul for the supreme test?

But such a Providence—again supposing it to exist—would be helpless without the answering spirit to avail itself of its gifts. We are not driven or shaped by our destinies; they speak to us in the fashion of William Wallace, when he arranged his spearmen at Falkirk—

“I have brought you to the ring—hop if you can.”

### 3.

Whatever it may have been in the old, leisurely days, the life of a King's minister, and especially one who takes his task so seriously as Winston Churchill, is one that calls for the whole of any ordinary man's time and energy. For nearly a quarter of a century, with two brief intervals, he had had his nose continually to this grindstone; day after day he had had to grapple with a mass of routine work and correspondence, to take all sorts of great and petty decisions, and, when Parliament was sitting, to be at his place on the Front Bench ready to answer questions or defend the policy of his department. Any man must infallibly, under such conditions, get into the habit of living from day to day upon such capital of ideas or philosophy as he may have had to start with. The renewal of the inner man becomes impossible under the stress of perpetual action.



But now he had time to look about him, and to adapt himself to the new world, so radically altered from that in which his apprenticeship had been served. It was a stage from which nearly all the original protagonists had made their final exit. Balfour, Asquith, Fisher, even his friend Birkenhead, had answered to the time-honoured call of "Who goes home?" while the memories of Kitchener and Joe Chamberlain were already, to the new generation, remote and historic. Mr. McKenna, having become something in the City, had ceased to be anything outside it. As for Mr. Lloyd George, he indeed continued as volcanic as ever, and his eruptions of periodical invective were hugely enjoyed, even by their victims; but his following had shrunk to a trio, his fund to nobody quite knew what, and his return to power had ceased to be regarded as a serious possibility.

It was not only that the familiar faces and landmarks had disappeared, but that the spirit of the new age was one to which Winston Churchill, of all people, was least capable of attuning his own. The utter boredom and disillusionment, the reduction of human nature to its lowest sub-human denominator, the debunking of enthusiasm, the Mephistophelean itch for perpetual denial and belittling—what part in these things had the hero-worshipping enthusiast, the joyous adventurer of the *fin de siècle*? He was as far removed from them as the positive from the negative pole.

But for that very reason he was able to divine something about its trend that the age itself was incapable of suspecting—something that might be fraught with mortal peril to civilization. For the world safe for democracy had palpably failed to materialize. The progress, in which the nineteenth century had believed more than in God, had been violently reversed. The tyranny of naked militarism was capturing nation after nation; in nation after nation the lights were going out as if they had successively been cut off at the main. The cause of free civilization, with which the British Commonwealth and the League of Nations were identified, was everywhere losing territory, power, prestige; and seemed in danger of losing its own soul. The brave new order that had emerged from the peace was no order at all, but an anarchy of egotisms. The channels of trade were everywhere blocked by artificial barriers; more and more energy was being diverted from the channels of peaceful progress into those of sheer destruction, or the preparation for it.

From all this Britain stood magnificently aloof. Public opinion was almost fanatically pacifist, and even the old Cobdenite belief in unconditional Free Trade survived intact till the Great Slump. Come what might, she was determined not to be drawn into the vortex, to stand aside from the madness of the armament race, and cultivate her own garden in peace. That she could do so had become a prime article of her faith; what was the League of Nations for but to make war impossible?

Now Churchill himself was as much a believer as any man in the

principle of collective security, provided only that it could be applied; but his keen eye for realities was capable of seeing how vain it was to trust for safety to a ragtag and bobtail of states, that it would be impossible to combine effectively for any purpose whatever. "Thank God", he exclaimed, "for the French army!" and it was upon the still overwhelming superiority of this force that he based his hopes of maintaining the peace of Europe for some considerable time to come—that, and the pre-occupation of Russia in the East.

Force was a fact, it was not a panacea; and unless force could be reinforced by justice, nobody realized more firmly than he that it was doomed to fail in the long run. "Let us have this blessed union", he said, "of power and justice. 'Agree with thine adversary quickly while thou art in the way with him.'"

The word appeasement is one that has fallen into much contempt of recent years, but just as it was Alfred the Great and not Ethelred the Unready who first paid Danegeld, so it was Winston Churchill and not Neville Chamberlain who might be claimed as the earliest and most consistent advocate among British statesmen, of appeasing Germany by the redress of her undoubted, and still outstanding, grievances under the peace settlement. Only—and here was the decisive difference—it was to be appeasement from a basis of strength and not of weakness; the free gift of magnanimity and not the forced concession of fear.

So, late in the Autumn of 1932, he gave this solemn warning: "The removal of the just grievances of the vanquished ought to precede the disarmament of the victors. To bring about anything like an equality of armaments . . . while these grievances remain unredressed, would be almost to appoint the date for another European war—to fix it as though it were a prize-fight."

But that was a thing which the British Government were incapable of seeing. The one German grievance that they had any serious idea of redressing was that of enforced disarmament under the Versailles Treaty, and they proposed to remedy it by putting Germany on a footing of equality with France. And for this they continued to press at Geneva even after the advent of Hitler to power. In their honest belief it was the way of peace; in Churchill's it was the short cut to Armageddon.

#### 4.

So violent, since the revelation of German strength and British unpreparedness, has been the revulsion of public opinion against the ministers who failed to warn or save the country from so disastrous a predicament, that it has become the fashion to write of them as if they were imbecile, if not criminal, drifters. This was far from being the impression at the time. The National—or as it would be more illuminating to call it—the Tory-Democratic Government, had been formed, at the direct instigation of the

Sovereign and with the overwhelming endorsement of the nation, to grapple with as alarming a crisis as any in British history. Its task was to avert what seemed to be the imminent prospect of bankruptcy and social chaos, and nurse back the country to economic convalescence. This task it had taken in hand, thanks largely to the financial genius of its key man, Neville Chamberlain, with vigour and almost unhopd-for success. The account that it was able to give of its stewardship at the end of four years was approved by another overwhelming majority at the polls.

What England had expected of it, it had done. It had received a doctor's mandate, to cure what was thought of as essentially an internal complaint. But what those who are wise after the event failed, at least as much as the ministers, to realize, was that it was a world sickness that had to be cured, of which the Great Slump was not the culmination, but the first spasm, the effects of which had been to undermine its powers of resistance. A germ of unheard-of malignancy had begun to proliferate in the world body, and in those members that still retained the appearance of health, there had ceased to be the vitality or the will to react strongly against it. This applied most of all to France; but it applied also to Britain, where no statesman who could possibly have arisen—not Churchill himself—could have rallied public opinion to the call for efforts or sacrifices on a sufficiently heroic scale.

Undoubtedly the weakest part of the Government's work was on the foreign side, but it is doubtful whether the strongest policy could have retrieved a situation which Britain had no means of controlling. The two great outstanding anarchies, military and economic, were dealt with in international conferences, which talked interminably and settled nothing, except that while armies should not, trade should be, restricted. And while this was going on, the newspaper posters, one January afternoon in 1933, bore the two words that spelt the death warrant of the Versailles, and Geneva, disorder of civilization—"CHANCELLOR HITLER". Reality was no longer knocking at the door, it had burst it open. The second World War had begun.

For that, and nothing less, was what the advent of Hitler implied. A new technique of perpetual war, without limit or scruple, had come into being; the most formidable nation in the world had been converted, at a stroke, into a gigantic war machine, working night and day at full blast to gather enough head of strength to ensure that when the moment of release came, it should strike once at each selected victim in turn, and strike no more. And to make all doubly sure, the assault on the body was to be preceded by one on the soul. The Panzer division—to use terms that would have signified nothing to the public of the early 'thirties—looked to find a Fifth Column waiting to receive it. It was Total War, aimed at nothing less than total conquest, total enslavement, total plunder—a world order of Hell on earth for the vast majority of mankind. That such a con-

spiracy against civilization should ever have been hatched outside a madhouse was a thing hitherto undreamed of; but that it should start with the odds, if anything, in its favour, had been beyond the prospect even of insane belief. And yet that, and nothing less, was the meaning and the power of this new spirit that, embodied in the Austrian corporal, had captured Germany. There would be henceforth one inexorable alternative; would Hitler end civilization, or would civilization end Hitlerism?

Nobody was quicker than Churchill to appreciate the menace implicit in this new phenomenon; and in 1935 he defined the situation in what must rank as one of the most unequivocally vindicated examples anywhere on record of the best sort of prophecy which divines the future in the present:

"The vanquished are in process of becoming the victors, and the victors the vanquished. When Hitler began, Germany lay prostrate at the feet of the Allies. He may yet see the day when Europe will be prostrate at the feet of Germany." \*

And yet, even then, more than two years after the advent of Hitler to power, it would be wrong to assume that the tragic opposition between these two men had defined itself, on either side, in terms of mortal hostility. On the contrary, Churchill's appreciation of Hitler is on record, and it is sympathetic to an extent that would imperil the liberty of a writer nowadays. He speaks of the long, wearing struggle that Corporal Hitler had been fighting for the German heart, one whose story

"Cannot be read without admiration for the courage, the perseverance, and the vital force which enabled him to challenge, defy, conciliate, or overcome, all the authorities or resistances that barred his path. He, and the ever-increasing legions who worked with him, certainly showed . . . in their patriotic ardour and love of country, that there was nothing they would not do or dare, no sacrifice of life, limb or liberty, that they would not make themselves or inflict on their opponents." †

If, as we may dare to hope, Providence or destiny has appointed Churchill to be the champion of civilization, in ordeal by battle against its arch enemy, we may take heart from these words. For the most successful duellist is not he whose hate makes him blind, but he whose imaginative sympathy penetrates the secret of his opponent's strength, and thus enables him to anticipate each move in advance, and make his own riposte with mortal accuracy at the point of weakness.

In this brief essay, which may well rank with future ages as the most historically significant of all Mr. Churchill's writings, there is not the least disposition to ignore or under-rate the evil potentialities implicit in the rise of Hitler. He was, in fact, far more alive to it than any other leading man of the time. But as yet he had not—even in the light of the devilries that had already staggered humanity

\* *Great Contemporaries*, p. 262.

† *Ib.* p. 265.

under Nazi auspices—come to regard the man as irrevocably committed to the dark path. With the innate chivalry that he had always had for an opponent, and especially for a brave man and a patriot, he tried to understand him; he sought to make allowances for “the child of the rage and grief of a mighty empire and race which had suffered overwhelming defeat”; the man who had “exorcised the spirit of despair from the German mind by substituting the not less deadly spirit of hate”.

Looking back on history, he saw it “replete with examples of men who have risen to power by employing stern, grim and even frightful methods but who, nevertheless, when their life is revealed as a whole, have been regarded as great figures whose lives have enriched the story of mankind. So”, he added, “may it be with Hitler.” \*

It was as if he had held out his hand in a final, almost a despairing gesture, before the duel to the death between them was irrevocably joined.

But because he had not given up hope, was no reason for taking chances. The virus of hate, as no one knew better than he, had taken entire possession of the German people and was being fostered by all the measureless resources of state-controlled propaganda. The war of revenge, the war that might end not only the British Empire but civilization itself, was actually being waged in the factories, and would in a very few years be ripe for the field. Hitler *might* show as wise a restraint in wielding power as he had vigour in achieving it; Hitler *might* be great enough to restrain the forces he had raised. Or again, he might not. The latter alternative seemed decidedly the more probable.

## 5.

But there was no need for speculation about Hitler's motive. There was the enormous fact of the great military power that was rising up under his control in the centre of Europe, and of the uses to which it might be put. There is no reason to suppose that even Churchill realised the full extent to which that power had been augmented by the Totalitarian technique. It was a matter for him less of seership than of plain commonsense and military instinct. He saw the German people, as he himself put it, “with all their grievances unredressed, with all their ambitions unsatisfied, continuing from strength to strength”; he saw the war machine that the war had been fought to destroy being built up again in defiance of the peace. And that being so, there was nothing for it but to create a counter-vailing force strong enough to remove the temptation to Germany of ever putting that machine into action against her neighbours.

It was, as he visualized it, a twofold problem. For England herself it had become a life or death necessity to maintain a navy overwhelmingly superior, and an air force at least equal, to that of Germany. And for all peace-loving nations, it was equally a life

\* Ib. p. 261.

and death matter to present a solid enough front to deter even the most powerful aggressor from breaking the peace. That was what the League of Nations was for; and Churchill, though he harboured no illusions about the international talking shop into which the League had degenerated, in practice remained staunch to the League principle.

Accordingly, through what were really the opening years of the Second World War, which Hitler designed to win in the factories before transferring it to the field, he never ceased in his efforts, in Parliament, on the platform, in the press, to rouse his countrymen "to control the hideous drift of events and arrest calamity on the threshold". That was the unvarying theme on which he continued to harp with passionate eloquence, "Stop it! Stop it!! Stop it now!!! now is the appointed time."

But his was a voice crying, and crying ineffectively, in the wilderness. It was a message that awakened no sympathetic response in the high places of Whitehall. The drift of events continued with gathering momentum, and neither Mr. Baldwin, nor anyone else in authority, appeared capable of arresting it. It is doubtful whether they could conceivably have done so, for once German rearmament had been allowed to get fairly under way, nothing whatever would have sufficed but to meet war with war, in the same kind, and on a commensurate scale. And we know now, or ought to know, what that would have entailed.

Suppose for a moment that any English Prime Minister, even if he had been Churchill, had proposed to put the country, as Hitler had put Germany, on a complete war footing, with full compulsory mobilization of industry and at least of man-power, and with an income tax of eight or ten shillings in the pound to finance it, he would certainly have been swept from office amid a unanimous howl of indignation. And yet, with the enemy waging Total War in time of peace, nothing less drastic could conceivably have availed to "stop it", and even that would have merely turned the war into one of competitive exhaustion, hardly less disastrous in the long run than one of naked destruction. The sure opportunity of stopping Hitler had been missed when the French politicians had turned a deaf ear to Marshal Pilsudski's offer \* to mobilise his 21 Polish corps, and join with France in an armed veto upon the first German attempt to reintroduce conscription; the last chance had been thrown away when they had ignominiously declined to call the Nazi bluff of marching into the Rhineland. And if on both these occasions British policy had sought rather to apply a brake than a stimulus to French resolution, nothing could have been more certain than that public opinion would have overwhelmingly rejected any firmer attempt to grasp the nettle.

But to say this is assuredly not to justify the ministers who, having

\* If we may trust the commonly accepted assertion, which awaits documentary proof, of such an offer having been made.

successfully mastered one crisis, now found themselves plunged into another, to which neither their imagination nor their resources were equal. That those who are most unsparing in their condemnation today, are the very men who laboured most strenuously at the time to render their task insuperable, may help to explain, but never explain away, the failure of these responsible leaders to open their own eyes, and those of the country, to the inescapable fact that war of total enslavement and partial extermination was not only intended to Britain, but had actually begun, and might well be lost beyond hope of recovery before a shot had been fired. The sterling service they had performed in surmounting the earlier crisis, imparts a note of high tragedy to their failure that is conspicuously lacking from the crook drama of contemporary French politics. If devils laughed at the spectacle of Pierre Laval, angels may perhaps have wept over that of Stanley Baldwin.

To the psychologist, however, it will merely seem a repetition of the oldest and commonest tragedy in the universe, that of the failure of the creature to adapt itself to environment. These well-meaning and at least averagely competent human beings, being posed with a riddle of the Sphinx to which they could find no conceivable answer, sought refuge in evasion. They successfully persuaded themselves that what was too bad to be true had no right to exist; that Providence would not suffer them to be tempted above that they were able. They did not, because they dared not, admit even to themselves the necessity for total mobilization, the mere suggestion of which would have been equivalent to throwing in their hand, and giving place to a ministry pledged to cut down armaments to a minimum. It was Mr. Baldwin's obsession with this dilemma that explains the staggering candour of his admission that he had concealed the extent of German rearmament from the country in order to win a general election. If the result of losing it would have been an English repetition of the *expérience Blum* in France, we may perhaps thank God that he did so, even if we are somewhat less inclined to thank Baldwin. Moreover that line of defence, such as it is, will not hold good for the failure to rouse the country *after* the election.

Of that, try as we will to make allowances, there can be only one explanation. It was not "practical politics". And it was to the tradition and atmosphere of practical politics that the minds of Mr. Baldwin and his colleagues had been attuned. No wonder that under such circumstances they had no use for the gifts of Winston Churchill, and barred him from the Cabinet as if he had been infected with leprosy. For practical politics, though he had played it in the past with as great a zest as any of them, was a game that he had put behind him for ever. He was unashamedly determined to look the worst in the face and, as far as in him lay, to make his countrymen do the same. And since no consideration of political or even patriotic expediency appeared likely to induce him to prophesy smooth

things, or to cry peace where there was no peace, it must surely be admitted that Mr. MacDonald, Mr. Baldwin, and Mr. Chamberlain, were merely consistent in deciding that he who refuses to play the game shall be denied his place in the team.

That is the explanation of some things that ruffled the complacency even of that apathetic person, the man in the street, who had at last woken up to the fact that the Hitlerite menace was a real one, and that some sort of rearmament drive was called for. He knew that the Government professed to be pushing on with this with all necessary urgency. But to the man in the street, to call for rearmament was to call for Winston. A ministry of munitions, or supply, seemed the one over which, with his war record, he was most obviously fitted to preside; but for various alleged reasons, more plausible than convincing, no such ministry was formed. And when a minister did get appointed to co-ordinate all three fighting services, to the amazement of the country the claims of Winston Churchill for the post were passed over in favour of a safe party man, who had presumably qualified for it by filling a succession of legal posts in various Governments.

It was better so. The inclusion of Churchill in the Cabinet, before the War, would only have saddled him with the discredit that fell upon the other ministers who failed to avert or arm against it. And what could even he have done to arm the country with an adequate air, let alone a military force, without calling on it for a far greater effort and sacrifice than it was prepared to tolerate in peace-time?

Providence or destiny had seen fit that he should bide his time in a position of complete freedom and detachment, the voice crying in the wilderness of things to which events would shortly bear witness. And though what he said was not what the man in the street wanted to be told, he was building his reputation higher than ever before by the sheer disinterested persistence of his warnings against the Nazi, or as it had now become, the Axis peril, and the suicidal inadequacy of the British preparation to meet it. As the consciousness of that peril grew, public confidence began gradually to centre on him as the strong man capable of standing up to those hectoring bullies in coloured shirts, of whom all other men seemed afraid.

One thing was certain. If the worst did come to the worst, the demand for him would be as irresistible as in 1914 it had been for Kitchener.

## 6.

We may think of him during these years as of an athlete withdrawn from the stadium, to undergo training for the supreme contest. The rearmament to which he could not persuade the nation, he could at least effect in his own soul.

No better way of doing this could be imagined than by intensive



reflection upon, and communion with, the personality of a hero who had accomplished the very labour that lay before himself,—the deliverance of Europe from a military tyrant of overwhelming strength. Most appropriate of all would it be, if he himself should have sprung from that hero's loins. It was not as an escape or diversion, therefore, but as an essential part of his career, that he was engaged, throughout the whole of the middle 'thirties, upon his *magnum opus*, the monumental biography of Marlborough.

This book alone, if nothing else were remembered of him, would be sufficient to establish his fame upon imperishable foundations. It is always a dangerous thing to forecast what is likely to be the valuation placed by posterity upon the works of one's own contemporaries, and yet it is at least a plausible forecast that when the work of our century comes to be viewed in historic perspective, this biographical classic will stand out in lonely majesty, like a pyramid in the desert, when all the specious and showy architecture that once clustered at its foot has been covered by the sands of time.

And this, if it be so, may be not unconnected with the fact that its own architecture constitutes a flagrant defiance of all the accepted canons. The inter-war generation of writers prided itself on nothing so much as its sublimation—and almost its discovery—of the art of biography. Lytton Strachey, who alone of his countrymen had mastered the alchemy of reproducing in English prose style the limpidity and charm of the greatest French masters, had applied it to a series of brilliant caricatures of Victorian worthies, and a somewhat more sympathetic study of Victoria herself. This had started one of the most amazing literary crazes or rackets ever known. Snappy and spicy biographies poured from the press in unending spate. Every colourable celebrity of the past was fallen upon and torn to pieces by completing debunkers and humanizers—for it was a necessary convention that no biographer was expected to understand or enlarge upon that aspect of his subject which constituted his special title to fame, so that it was possible to execute such a *tour de force* as a full-length biography of Wellington, that practically bypassed his campaigns! Lives were private lives; and private lives were more often than not, like the Freudian Id, sex lives.

It is extraordinary how little of this vast biographical output has left any enduring mark. Certainly the united efforts of the post-Stracheyan hordes have not succeeded in producing one single biography conceivably capable of ranking with the acknowledged masterpieces of the past, even if we widen that category enough to include the *Randolph Churchill*. And the *Marlborough* is an achievement of far greater scope and majesty.

It is everything that, according to the modern school, a biography ought not to be. The "excessive length", to quote one of the masters of this school, of its more than 2,000 pages, should alone be sufficient to damn it. Who can be expected to read so vast a compilation from

the first to the last of its 126 chapters? The answer is anyone, of normal intelligence and concentration. In fact, he may find some difficulty in leaving it off, so compelling is the grip of the style. That is where Churchill scores from his sedulous apprenticeship to the Macaulayese, and still more to the Gibbonian model. For Gibbon's flight is that of the condor, which seems almost incapable of lifting its ponderous body from the ground, but once its wings are fully spread, is able to soar over vast spaces with hardly the semblance of effort.

But what, from the modern view, forms an even more damning count in the indictment, is the treatment of the hero. For to Churchill, Marlborough is a hero, and a hero of heroes. He has examined his record, to the last and obscurest document, and found it true to itself throughout—a superb vindication of what one man can achieve not only in shaping the course of history, but in the arming of his own soul against every test to which it can possibly be subjected. For Marlborough in the noblest, as well as in the most scientific sense, was a self-made man. In his career, we can watch what is perhaps the most consummate success on record in the adaptation of human nature to a self-chosen environment.

It is true that the advance of the narrative is in places slowed down, but never halted, by the necessity of clearing from its path certain long-entrenched slanders, and particularly those of Macaulay, which have passed unchallenged for nearly a century, and by which an almost invincible prejudice has been created against Marlborough. It must be remembered that this book is not intended to compete with the cinema in providing a mild stimulus for jaded nerves, but to vindicate the truth about one of the greatest of Englishmen; and the author pays his reader the compliment of believing him to be as seriously concerned as himself. Dull indeed must he be whose heart is not warmed by the spectacle of Winston Churchill swinging all his forces into action against a fighter worthy of his steel!

There is yet another respect in which the book fails to pass muster by the accepted standard. Its subject is, as the title indicates, Marlborough, not merely "Marlborough the Man" or "The Private Life of Marlborough"—though this in its place and proportion is fully and exquisitely treated—but the Marlborough of history, the supreme master of the art of war, the diplomat and statesman, whose genius was equal to every situation, and never, so far as our knowledge goes, at fault. Churchill does not shrink from the highest challenge of his theme. As a military history alone, the account of the Duke's campaigns is unsurpassed, and probably final. As the secrets and subtleties of the great strategist's mind are unravelled, one realizes what a commander was lost to his country when the young Winston forsook a military career for politics. And from Sedgemoor to the breaking of the *Ne plus ultra* line, we have a series of battle pictures that make the colours on the map come alive, and impart to the

reader himself some inkling of the true soldier's joy that in the "burning moment"

takes

Him by the throat and makes him blind.

We may regret this emphasis on the heroic side of so essentially devilish a business as war, but we must remember that the author himself was one who had experienced this joy to the fullest degree, and on whom the presence of mortal danger acted like wine.

We may regret too that Churchill's hero-worship should lead him to so extremely charitable an interpretation as he puts on certain incidents in Marlborough's early career—that, particularly, of his cold-blooded treason to King James, whose trusted commander he was, and to whose service he had bound himself by every obligation of military honour. But it is his descendant's own point of view, held with passionate sincerity, and without the least attempt to conceal or juggle with the evidence. He is entitled to it, as we are to our own, and any departure would impair the unity of the drama. After all, the effect of the first great Churchill on the soul of the third is, in itself, a historical fact perhaps as important as Blenheim.

For what, when all is said and done, matters most about Churchill on Marlborough, is not the claim that it gives him to whatever corresponds to the Premiership of contemporary letters, but its part in preparing him for a Premiership of another sort. It is not only that the heroic, like the saintly character, is formed in the image of that which it most worships, but that the imitation of Marlborough more than of any other hero was calculated to impart that restraint and coolness of judgment the lack of which had, in the past, tended to be the besetting weakness of Winston's, as it had been of Randolph Churchill's, brilliance.

## 7.

During these years of a war that was as yet undeclared, Churchill's political activities were almost entirely confined to his self-appointed task of awakening his countrymen to the urgency of their peril, and endeavouring to rouse the Government out of their fearful complacency in the matter of armaments. There was only one occasion on which he diverged to any notable extent from his concentration on this one end, and that was when he made a sensational and lonely intervention on behalf of the uncrowned King, Edward VIII, during the crisis that ended in his abdication.

There is fortunately no need for the biographer of Churchill to undertake the delicate and dangerous task of expressing an opinion, one way or the other, on the issues at stake in this tragic controversy, except to say—what must now be obvious to everybody—that if at a time of such supreme peril a change of monarchs had to be effected, in order to avoid a situation damaging to the prestige of

the Crown, the need for doing so with as little disturbance and friction as possible possessed an importance over-riding every personal consideration. And no one who listened to King Edward's moving and dignified words of farewell to his people, could have been in the least doubt that this was his own personal standpoint.

But the spectacle of the gallant and attractive Prince, of whom up to so recently no language had been heard save that of the most extravagant adulation, suddenly made the object of a merciless campaign of detraction in press and pulpit, and in process of being hustled off the throne with what seemed indecent haste by his own ministers, was one calculated to appeal irresistibly to that instinct of chivalrous generosity by which Churchill's nature, and his cooler judgment, were so easily swayed. The man who could accord fair play even to Hitler, was not one to stand by and see it denied to his own Sovereign; and to know that the revulsion of sentiment caused by that Sovereign's affront to sexual taboo was so violent as to render it grossly imprudent to support him, was stimulus more powerful than reason to a stand on his behalf:

For loyalty is still the same  
Whether it win or lose the game.

To oppose himself to the current, therefore, with an impassioned plea for "the utmost chivalry and compassion . . . towards a gifted and beloved King torn by private and public obligations and love and duty", was only what anyone who knew him would have expected of Churchill. But one wonders whether it may not possibly have struck him, engaged as he was on the latter stages of his great biography, that this was the last thing that anyone would have expected of his hero Marlborough, who would certainly have characterized so unprofitable an outbreak by his own favourite epithet "silly". Which may explain why John Churchill, even with Winston to vindicate him, may be admired perhaps more, for the almost flawless consistency of his genius, but never loved or liked half as much as this irrepressibly human descendant of his.

To a superficial observer it might have seemed that Churchill had never fallen so low as when, pressing his point in the teeth of the sentiment of the House, he was denied a hearing in the Commons, being assailed from all directions by angry cries of "Sit down". There were even those who, unable to comprehend his motives, suspected him of so criminal an ambition as that of coming to power at the head of a King's party, and appealing to popular sentiment over the heads of the existing ministers—an imputation as preposterously disparaging to the King himself as it was to him. And yet it might well have been deemed the only way of fitting his action into any scheme of "practical politics".

It was, in reality, the most conclusive proof he could have afforded of his final detachment from such considerations. He had attained that stage of a hero's career when truth to his own soul has come to

matter more to him than success. Habitually now, as he had done at the time of his escape from captivity, he would obey the inner voice, regardless of every other prompting, and then, if the power for which he disdained to turn aside should eventually come his way, he would be better qualified than ever before to wield it.

And even by the most worldly reckoning, the effect of his intervention was by no means unfavourable. The average Englishman may have turned down his protest, with some momentary irritation, but in the long run, as is the way of Englishmen, he respected him all the more for it, as a good fellow and a sportsman; especially when it became apparent that having said his say while the decision was in suspense, he was, once the abdication had become an accomplished fact, prepared to let the controversy drop, and unite with all loyal subjects in making a success of the new reign.

## 8.

Even so moving a drama as that of the abdication was soon to be swept almost out of memory, by the insistence of greater events. The coronation of the new Sovereign, in whom the nation was quick to recognize a born adept in the highly specialized function that had been thrust upon him, was the last time for who can tell how long, that the nation would be able to unite, without an afterthought, in the ritual of carefree rejoicing. All the same, it was proof of a certain detachment or slowness of imagination that it should have been so. For the Second World War, in which Britain was none the less involved from the fact that as yet she was merely in process of being out-manœuvred and out-armed in preparation for the *coup de grâce* at her enemy's appointed time, was already well advanced, and that enemy's strategic plan working with foreseen accuracy through what had already become a series of victories. Germany had smashed the Treaty of Versailles by rearming; she had effectively cut off France from going to the aid of her Eastern satellites, by fortifying the Rhineland; she had brought over Italy to her side, and seen an Italian Empire planted on the rear of the British outpost in Egypt; she and her new accomplice were actively engaged in fomenting a Fascist revolution in Spain; Japan, already linked with her in the Anti-Comintern Pact, was just about to take the war-path in China. Everywhere vital positions were being seized, with or without a blow; everywhere the balance of advantage was being tilted against the victors of the last war. But what was most disastrous of all, while the enemy was pushing ruthlessly forward on a footing of Total War, the infatuated democracies persisted in remaining on one of peace, so that every day that passed saw the odds against them being augmented at a rate of geometrical progression. Let this only go on long enough, and the time would come when they might as well lie down under the yoke without the formality of resistance.

This was the monstrous reality that Churchill came nearer to

grasping than any other of his countrymen, and against which he persisted in warning them with as much of passionate conviction, and hardly less of eloquence than Demosthenes undertaking the same task against the Macedonian peril. It was no longer a case for "stopping it now"—it had gone too far for that; the call to the defenders of civilization was "Quit you like men, be strong". It was only the opposition of a power equal or superior to his own, that might induce Hitler, who preferred gambling on certainties, to postpone indefinitely the launching of his open and final assault.

But the supineness of Britain and—what the darkest pessimists had hardly dared to suspect—the still more disastrous rottenness that was eating at the heart of France, cut away the ground on which any such hope might have been formed. Early in 1938 Hitler, having purged the moderate elements from his High Command, judged that the time had come to fling the whole force of his reconstituted army openly into the contest, though, like the prudent commander he was, he naturally preferred to fall with overwhelming strength on each of his enemies in turn, and break his faggot stick by stick. It was Austria accordingly on whom the first violence of his assault was directed, and this proud but unhappy state, carefully prepared by inoculation with the Nazi virus, gave up the ghost without a struggle, and without any of the states of a horrified Europe lifting more than an admonitory finger to save her. After Austria it was the turn of Czechoslovakia, the rape of whose strategic frontier—which would make it easy for Hitler to swallow her whole at the second bite—was openly timed for the beginning of Autumn. The effect of this would be to bring the whole system of alliances by which France, and through France Britain, had trusted to insure themselves against German ambitions, crashing in ruins. If the Western democracies were weak, or degenerate, enough to concede this decisive advantage without a blow, it might reasonably be concluded that they were past praying or fighting for. And indeed not only France, whose honour was solemnly pledged to the support of the Czechs, but even the British Government, which was not, made it clear to Hitler and all the world that the point had been reached at which they were prepared to die rather than yield. It was a brave gesture, but as Hitler's Foreign Minister, von Ribbentrop, assured him, it was bluff. Hitler acted on that assumption, and went on contemptuously with his programme. The result was seen at Munich. And yet Neville Chamberlain, the British Premier, who had flown thither, armed with his symbolic umbrella, to pass beneath the Nazi yoke, knew enough about his country's utter defencelessness to assault from the air, and the hopelessness of relying on French support, to have pleaded, in a different sense from that of Luther,

"I cannot do otherwise, God help me!"

But the scene of hysterical joy in the Commons when it was known that Hitler had conceded a brief stay of execution to the

Western democracies, on condition of their throwing their Czech partner to his wolves, and the services of thanksgiving which were held all over the country to celebrate that unhallowed sacrifice, seemed to reveal an even lower depth of abjection. The Führer could hardly have been blamed, if the spectacle of his most formidable enemy, thus apparently resigned to a dream paradise of peace without honour, should have led him to conclude that his war, though as yet unfought, was as good as won. But there is reason to doubt whether this subtlest of schemers took quite so much, even now, for granted. Though, in the appropriate phrase of his kind, Hitler had put Britain on the spot, he had never made the mistake of despising her, or of imagining that she was afflicted with the same sort of moral dry rot that he had divined in France. Her fighting spirit was not dead but dormant, and only needed a man with enough fire in his own soul to kindle it into a blaze. And it would seem that his demonic faculty of intuition had warned him of the existence of such a man in Churchill. Hitler had no spark of the chivalrous instinct that warmed Churchill's heart towards an opponent worthy of his steel; the one compliment that he ever dreamed of paying to opposition was that of a hatred for which nothing was too gross or too petty. His propaganda organs had long promoted Churchill to a primacy of denigration, but now he himself was about to confirm the honour, and seal the relationship that was henceforth to keep them joined in mortal combat as long as they both should live.

All the time that the Nazi avalanche had been gathering momentum, Churchill had only been able to play the part of an unwanted Jeremiah—though why the name of that patriot seer should always be used with a sneering implication is one of the mysteries of language. He had pleaded most strenuously of all for that adequate air arm, the lack of which had placed Mr. Chamberlain at Munich under the dreadful constraint of sacrificing everything else in order to save London. He had, earlier in the year, lifted his voice in vain against the criminal insanity of handing over Britain's indispensable Atlantic bases in Eire to placate the implacable Mr. de Valera, who received them without thanks, merely noting that being still short of her proper complement of counties, there could be no change in his country's attitude towards England.

It was on the morrow of Munich that Churchill rose from that corner seat below the gangway, of such memorable associations, to deliver what must certainly rank as, up to that date, the most impressive of all his orations—most impressive of all from its impassioned restraint. There is not a word of reproach or censure—"No one", he acknowledged, "has been a more resolute and uncompromising struggler for peace than the Prime Minister"—no single attempt to score a debating point; the occasion was too solemn for that. But shred by shred he tore to pieces that dreadful cloak of moral and material complacency in which the nation had sought to

wrap itself. Some at least of those who had participated in that recent orgy of ignoble rejoicing, must have felt as if it were the voice of their own consciences reminding them—"All is over. Silent, mournful, abandoned, broken, Czechoslovakia recedes into the darkness. She has suffered in every respect by her association with the Western democracies and the League of Nations. . . ."

They were, he told them—and rubbed it in with merciless explicitness of detail—in presence of a disaster of the first magnitude, faced with the unendurable prospect of becoming a satellite of Nazi domination, soon to be confronted with demands to surrender not only their territory but their liberty. For, he warned them,

"Do not suppose that this is the end . . . this is only the first sip, the first foretaste of a bitter cup that will be proffered to us year by year, unless by a supreme recovery of moral health and martial vigour, we arise again and take our stand for freedom as in the olden time."

Whatever may have been the effect of these words at Westminster, they had not passed unmarked at Berlin. Hitler, perhaps ill content that he had allowed himself to be fobbed off by so unexpectedly abject a surrender from making an end of Britain when, as he no less than Chamberlain may have reckoned, he had got her at his mercy, now perceived that the worst, from his point of view, had happened, and that a man had arisen capable of rousing up her ancient spirit to an eleventh-hour resistance that might yet be most disconcerting to his plans. His reaction was instant, and dramatic. Within four days of this speech he delivered himself, at Saarbrücken, of what even for him was a notably venomous diatribe, in which he singled out Churchill as the object of his peculiar wrath, linking his name with those of the ex-ministers Duff Cooper and Eden, as symbolic of a spirit whose free expression anywhere had become an intolerable offence to him. Almost exactly a month later, in the uncongenial surroundings of Goethe's Weimar, he returned to this attack with greater fury than ever, accusing Churchill, whom he characterized as "moonstruck", of conspiring with traitors for the overthrow of his Government, and denouncing the "madness and stupidity" of his wholly imaginary words to this effect. It was in vain that Churchill hastened to reply to this Billingsgate, by a courteous assurance that neither he, nor his two friends, had ever dreamed of aggression to Germany; and that after paying a generous tribute to Hitler's work for his country, he should have implored "this great man" to search his own heart and conscience before he accused others of warmongering.

The great man was not to be appeased, since he was at least great enough to realize that, whatever they may have signified for their own countrymen, it was not Chamberlain with the umbrella, but Churchill with the sword, who now stood for England—the England he was determined to destroy.



It was amazing that even now, with Hitler pushing on his offensive with less disguise than ever before, and the Government doing its insufficient best to make good the leeway in armaments, Churchill should still have been left out of responsible office, even though a golden opportunity had presented itself for bringing him in, when Mr. Duff Cooper, unable to brook the shame of Munich, had resigned from the Admiralty. One can only surmise that Chamberlain, still banking desperately on the continuance of the Munich spirit, hesitated to offer what would certainly have been interpreted by Hitler as an open challenge. But it may also have been that this honest man of business, to whom the very idea of war was—and no one who heard it on the ether can ever forget the tragic intonation of his voice—“horrible”, may have recognized something fundamentally incompatible between his spirit, and that of the born fighter, on whom the very idea of battle acted as a tonic, and who now, as much as Hitler himself, was thinking in terms not of avoiding war, but of winning a war that was no longer to be avoided. •

Even after the now headlong drift of events had made it plain even to Chamberlain that he, and the country through him, had been cynically duped, the difference between them subsisted. Churchill had, indeed, never allowed that difference to betray him into the pettiness of making a scapegoat of one whom he afterwards was to characterize as a man of tough fibre, who would fight as obstinately for victory as he had for peace. When on the Ides of the following March, the tyrant threw off the last pretence of honour or goodwill, and proceeded to the full enslavement of the little nation that England and France had abandoned to his mercies, the Premier had watched the event with what we may imagine to be the feelings of one who has sought to appease a tiger by turning him loose in the antelope's pen. But Chamberlain's attitude had sprung from no weakness, but rather from an almost fanatical hope of avoiding what was, to him, the ultimate and supreme evil. Whatever Hitler may have thought of the gullible old gentleman with the umbrella, he was the last man in the world to be duped twice, and he had made up his mind that never again would he trust the word of a liar or yield to the threats of a bully. And in this he followed rather than reflected the mood of the country. There would be no more thanksgivings for surrender. The people had been gorged sick with humble pie; their only anxiety now was lest their leaders should show the least sign of a white feather. If That Man wanted a fight, let him come on, and the sooner the better!

Chamberlain accordingly, when it became evident that the next victim on the programme, timed for Autumn at the latest, was Poland, hesitated not a moment in making it clear to Hitler that the first attempt to remove that neighbour's landmark, which he had guaranteed with such particular solemnity, would bring Eng-

land as well as France—which, for what that was worth, was already pledged—to Poland's assistance.

As a moral gesture, that was worthy of the man, and the nation, that made it, though it is more than doubtful whether Hitler, with the fate of Czechoslovakia in mind, took it particularly to heart. But to Neville Chamberlain it represented a moral man's determination to do right regardless of consequences. And this was where the still peace-loving and peace-hoping civilian differed from Churchill, who, being a soldier, thought of the consequences, and the military consequences, very seriously indeed. It was easy enough to pledge assistance; but what assistance could England and France, with their hopelessly inferior air arm, and the barrier of the Rhineland staring them in the face, possibly give? If Poland were left to stand by herself in the East of Europe, Hitler had got her cold, whatever the Western democracies might do. Nay, looking at it from what must have been Chamberlain's own standpoint—would not the consciousness of this winning advantage prove an irresistible inducement to Hitler to accept the challenge, and thus precipitate the final struggle under conditions of maximum advantage to himself?

Churchill was as alive to the moral aspect as Chamberlain—but this was not only war, but Total War, and in war one must survey the situation with an eye of a realist. So regarded, there was but one answer to the Polish riddle—and it was Russia. Unless that enormous force could be brought into action behind that of Poland, all the valour of that country's out-numbered, out-mechanized, and isolated armies would go for nothing. It was a thing that the infatuated ring of politicians who had got control of Poland, and had already induced her to play jackal to Hitler, were incapable of seeing—but it was a thing that, to such a mind as Churchill's, they ought to be made to see. Acts of faith must be performed by the opponents of Nazidom, and accordingly the British Government had the right to ask the Polish leaders to study this problem of a Russian alliance in a spirit of practical urgency.

This from the man who more than any other was known for the intransigence of his hatred towards Bolshevism and all its works, the man who would have turned loose the German armies after the last war to settle the account of civilization with the Red Peril! And there is no reason to believe that Churchill had in the least modified his views about a Communism which, as he was to maintain many months later, rots the soul of a nation. But all that had ceased to count, except in so far as it might affect the military potential of a Russian alliance. He certainly remembered that characteristic aphorism of Marlborough's—"Interest never lies." And it was the interest of Russia, more obviously even than that of Britain, to throw all her resources into the new Grand Alliance against the author of the Anti-Comintern Pact. In war, it is not possible to be too nice in the choice of one's associates. He who is not against us is for us.

But that was not how the situation could possibly present itself to

Chamberlain. Having defined his position, and taken his stand on what he believed to be the right ground, he refused even to the last to despair of peace, or to adapt his mind—had that been possible—to war conditions. What he had felt about the Russians before, he felt now. He did not trust them, and he did not like them. The whole idea of a Red alliance was profoundly distasteful to him, and not only to him in Government circles. Though it is impossible to produce proof of such an assertion, there seems some reason for believing that he would sooner have resigned than been party to it. It is at least certain that his Government, instead of pushing forward, and urging the Poles forward, with the desperate energy that Churchill would have imparted to so vital a purpose, conducted the negotiations in such an atmosphere of dilatoriness and suspicion, and in such a spirit of like it or leave it, as to convince Stalin that his only game was the mutual confidence trick of a pact with Germany, which—however it might work out eventually—would certainly be decisive of the fate of Poland in the first instance, probably of France in the second, and after that, unless something or somebody unpredictable intervened, of Britain. It was only, he might have reflected, what they had asked for.

Having thus induced his enemies to play into his hands even more signally than at Munich, Hitler could not be too quick about his next move, which was to finish off Poland. Until he had swallowed and digested that considerable morsel, he was not ready to deal with the Western democracies, and—since he was well aware that they were in no case to deal with him—it probably did not bother him very much if, contrary to his expectations, they should make a show of honouring their bond, and consider themselves more formally in a state of war than they had been before. They would get war enough in the field when their turn came; until then they might sit down, if they liked, and play at soldiers on the frontier, while he was making all sure in the factories and in Poland.

But for the British people, with their minds still fixed in the tradition of the past, the Second World War had begun when as from 11 a.m. September 3 Britain solemnly declared it on Germany, and, after an only too significant interval of six hours, the French politicians plucked up heart to follow suit.

But, except for a bogus alarm on the sirens, it seemed to make singularly little difference to the peaceful course of life on those glorious late summer days. There was one effect, however, of the change to a state of war, which, though the whole nation knew it to be a matter of course, caused it to breathe an immense sigh of relief. Churchill went into the Government. He could no more have been kept out than the sun could have been stopped from rising. And since the sea was the only location where Britain was actively at war, it was equally inevitable that he should go to the Admiralty, and resume his chair in the old familiar board room that must have been peopled, for him, with ghosts.

The event had not passed unnoticed by Hitler, who honoured it after his fashion with a splutter of hate through his propaganda. The British liner *Athenia* had been torpedoed at sea; and it was shamelessly put about in Britain that a German submarine might have had something to do with it. This was, of course, absurd, since there could be no possible doubt in any properly conditioned Aryan mind that the only man who had, or could have, done such a deed, was Churchill himself, in order to convince an incredulous world that butter would melt in a Nazi mouth!

10.

The atmosphere must have struck him as strangely different from what it had been when he and Prince Louis had mobilized the fleet just a quarter of a century previously. There was none of that excitement and high enthusiasm that had swept a people to whom war was a new and thrilling experience, and the crusade for little Belgium a high inspiration. It was just a transition from a peace that had been no peace to a war that was no proper war, except where Poland was having the life bludgeoned and tortured out of her without the least attempt of her allies to honour their guarantee to defend her. While German planes were bombing Warsaw to rubble, and even machine-gunning workers in the Polish fields, Allied bombers were taking advantage of their pre-occupation to rain down leaflets on Germany, the airmen having received strict instructions not to release anything more deadly, since Field Marshal Goering, at the head of the German Luftwaffe, had threatened to take really drastic action about it. And this was a war that the French General Staff had convinced itself could be ordered and settled without anything drastic being done at all—except, of course, to the Poles. And the British Government was so far of their mind as to issue a pamphlet full of diagrams and statistics to prove the Premier's soporific assurance that "the Allies are bound to win in the end".

But the perfect gentlemen's agreement to avoid unpleasantness was tacitly understood not to apply to Churchill's province of the High Seas. There, as the fate of the *Athenia* had shown, it was grim war from the first, with the Allies striving to grip Germany in the stranglehold of a blockade, and the Germans countering with a renewal of that submarine counter-blockade which had come so near to decisive success in the previous war. In spite of ominously large opening figures of sunk Allied tonnage, the Admiralty proceeded to get down to the job with its usual quiet efficiency. There were none of the high lights there had been in the last war—no Fisher to impress his personality on the public as that of the latter-day Nelson, and no attempt of the First Lord to impose himself in the part of Admiralissimo, still less to fling about his weight in every other field of warlike activity. He and his admirals worked together

this time in frictionless harmony, and with the minimum of advertisement.

And indeed, from a publicity standpoint, it might not have seemed that the Admiralty was starting conspicuously well. There was the loss of the aircraft-carrier *Courageous*, followed by the really disturbing incident of a German submarine penetrating the defences of Scapa Flow, and sending to the bottom the Dreadnought *Royal Oak*. Such a disaster would have been enough to create a major political crisis in the last war; now the public confidence in Churchill was, if anything, enhanced by his frank promise that the Admiralty, on whose behalf he accepted the responsibility, would learn the bitter lesson that in this new war nothing must be taken for granted. There was now one thing in the war that the British people *had* come to take for granted, which was their faith in Churchill himself.

That, if one comes to think of it, is about the most striking example on historic record of the way in which whole nations, and communities, may become at times of crisis, as if their members were in literal truth the cells of one body politic, animated by a single soul, with a thought and purpose of its own. Nothing emerges more clearly during the nineteen-thirties than that it was the British Demos—for the term John Bull seems grotesquely inadequate in such a connection—who was the determining influence in shaping the course of events. Right up to the time of Munich that person had been fixed in an invincible determination, that under no circumstances whatever would he ever allow himself again to be drawn into a world war, or so much as to envisage seriously such a possibility. Even to Churchill he had refused to accord more than an increasingly respectful hearing; the only leadership he had been willing to follow had been that of men who, like Baldwin, could assure him in a loud and firm voice that all was well, or who, like Chamberlain, could purchase him peace without counting the cost. But in those few months that had intervened between the first and final rape of Czechoslovakia, he had taken counsel with his own soul, and undergone conversion. He knew now that he had been wrong; that not the leaders in whom he had confided, but the faithful counsellor whose warnings he had put from him, had been right all along. He felt in the depths of his soul that there was but one man capable of retrieving his tarnished honour and making good the gaps in his defences, one leader in whom he dared confide to bring him through to victory. If it must be Total War, then, so far as Britain was concerned, it should be Churchill's war. So long as the war was only Total at sea, he might be allowed to conduct it from the Admiralty, but no possible vicissitudes of fortune on that element could deflect the now settled purpose of the country that the moment the war, the real war, became general, Churchill should step into the place that rightfully belonged to him.

This determination was confirmed and strengthened during the months that followed of a war that never seemed to get into its

stride, and about which the country was beginning to sense, in spite of official assurances, something—it knew not what—pregnant with disaster. More and more an uneasy suspicion was gaining ground, that the men on both sides of the Channel responsible for running the war on land were resigned to let the combined armies settle peacefully down behind the impregnable French fortifications, waiting for the enemy to do something. And that, as even the ordinary civilian was capable of grasping, is not the way in which wars are won.

It was then with an ever-increasing conviction that public confidence came to repose in the leadership of the one man, who was not only heart and soul in the war, but also all out to win it. For Churchill had one advantage that neither he, nor any other leader, had enjoyed during previous wars; he could speak directly to every one of the people, as a commander is able to put heart into his troops by the sound of his voice. A Churchill broadcast seemed the one thing able to dispel the depressing atmosphere of what, on the other side of the Atlantic, was being scoffed at as a "phoney war". Those muscular sentences, driven home with a rasping incisiveness that may have been partly the effect of having had to conquer an original tendency to stammer—how different they were from the tired periods, heavy with war-weariness, of the Premier; how much more the sort of thing the people wanted to hear!

"Our desire to see an unarmed world was proclaimed as a proof of our decay. Now we have begun. Now we are going on. Now, with the help of God, and with the conviction that we are the defenders of civilization and freedom, we are going to persevere to the end."

That was the spirit that Cromwell and Chatham had known how to inspire in their countrymen, and it was only waiting for the man, and the occasion, great enough to resurrect it. The man had arrived; the occasion might not be far behind.

## II.

The spring of the following year saw the process of Total enslavement, with which the Western democracies had not attempted to interfere, so far accomplished in Poland, that Hitler was ready for the next move in his programme of world conquest. Still ostentatiously ignoring the existence of those passive legions on his Western frontier, he turned aside, without warning or pretext, to add to his list of victims the unoffending states of Denmark, which submitted without a blow, and Norway, to which he applied a technique of calculated treachery in line with the palmiest crook tradition, but whose success was equal to its audacity.

It was a rude awakening from the dream of a war that could be won sitting down, and the shock to British complacency was terrific; for Norway, like Britain, was overseas from Germany, and presumably under the safeguard of British sea power, and yet here were

every one of her important cities, and the control of her far-stretched coastline, falling into the enemy's hands overnight. But this was not the worst, for it soon became apparent that what Hitler had won, he would also hold, and that he had every intention of using the sea route to the Norwegian capital as freely and regularly for the passage of his troops and engines of war, as if it had been one of the great motor roads he had built across Germany. And like most of Hitler's other plans up to date, it seemed that this too was working accurately to programme. The navy did, indeed, score one or two startling successes, and took its toll of cruisers and destroyers, but without in the least deflecting the enemy from his main purpose; the invasion swept remorselessly on, and a hastily improvised Allied, mainly British, force, that was flung ashore in a desperate effort to stem the tide, merely came up against the hitherto unrealized strength of the German military machine, and had all it could do to get away comparatively intact.

The reaction of the British mind to these shattering events was one that could hardly have been imagined by anyone not intimately acquainted with its workings. For whatever incidental successes it may have scored, it was beyond question that the navy, through no fault of its own, had sustained one of the most signal rebuffs in its annals, and British sea-power had suffered an abatement that no one had believed possible. Moreover it was only too apparent that Churchill himself had been woefully out in his first estimate of the situation, for he had talked of sinking all German ships on the approaches to Norway, of seizing as much of the coastline as we chose, and had allowed himself to expatiate with premature optimism on a strategic blunder of Hitler's, comparable to Napoleon's invasion of Spain. Before a month was out it had become apparent that the only incident in the Peninsular War to which there was likely to be the remotest parallel, was the retreat to Corunna, and that for a quite indefinite time to come, it was not Hitler who was likely to be afflicted with a Norwegian ulcer.

Such apparent failure, in the eyes of any people less steadfast in its loyalties, or on the part of any leader deemed less worthy of its allegiance, would have been irrecoverable. And yet not for one moment was there the slightest wavering of confidence in Churchill in any party or section—and one is almost tempted to say any individual—in the country. It is the astounding but unchallengeable fact that the effect of this Norwegian fiasco, and the apprehension of worse things to follow, was to create an overwhelming demand for his removal from the Admiralty, not to the darkness of final failure, but to the supreme control of the State.

However much democracy may have been tried and found wanting in the past, on this occasion of supreme trial it justified the highest hopes of its believers. Never had the spirit of a "great and understanding people" been more triumphantly vindicated, never had it been more faithfully reflected in the High Court of Parliament.

Of all the debates that have made history in the ancient Palace of Westminster, none is surely more remarkable than that which took place on the 7th and 8th of May, after the Allied expeditionary force had been driven to its ships, and King Haakon, with his ministers, hounded into exile. But this was not all. The air was tense with the expectation of some far greater impending crisis that would put this Norwegian affair almost out of memory. Churchill himself uttered the solemn warning, that at no time in the last war were we in greater peril than we were now; and his audience knew in their hearts that these were no idle words.

It was an extraordinary and almost unique situation, for a major part of the criticism that was now directed from all parts of the House against the conduct of the operations that had resulted in such unredeemed failure, was, in the nature of the case, due to the Admiralty. Churchill was ostensibly in the dock, to make the best defence he could against a very ugly indictment. He himself was nothing loath; it had never been his way to run from a challenge, still less would it have been in him to allow the blame to be shifted off his own shoulders to those of the Prime Minister, of whose sterling and steadfast worth he had become more than ever conscious during the months of their war comradeship. But the House knew its own mind, and it was Lloyd George who in what may have been the last, but was certainly not the least, of his oratorical masterpieces, gave the voice, and when Churchill rose to claim complete responsibility for everything that had been done at the Admiralty, swept him aside with the remark that he must not allow himself to be converted into an air-raid shelter to keep the splinters from hitting his colleague.

"The nation", he said, "is prepared for every crisis so long as it has leadership"—and not a Member present was in the least doubt whose leadership he meant—and, he concluded, "I say solemnly that the Prime Minister should give an example of sacrifice, because there is nothing that can contribute more to victory in this war than that he should sacrifice the seals of office."

Mr. Lloyd George had notoriously no love for Neville Chamberlain, but on this occasion he was voicing the sentiments not only of the House, but the country and Commonwealth. It was not that they respected Neville less, but that they wanted Winston more.

Churchill himself wound up the debate in one of his most vigorous fighting speeches—almost too vigorous, in parts, for the dignity of the status he had acquired as leader elect of the nation. There was one occasion on which he even gave way to one of those explosions of temper that must have reminded Mr. Lloyd George, who was about the only Member old enough to recall them, of the joyous passages of arms of the old freelance days. But though this was a welcome relief in the atmosphere of tension that hung over the proceedings, it made no practical difference. The House had decided that the Chamberlain Government must go, and signified its inten-



that needed no uplift, but dared look the worst in the face, and only asked to be called upon, each to the limit of his or her capacity, for the utmost that each had to contribute to the salvation of all?

We know his words, as our children and children's children will know them, so long as Britain stands, or freedom endures:

"I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat. . . . We have before us many, many long months of struggle and of suffering. You ask, what is our policy? I will say: It is to wage war by sea, land, and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: it is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival."

The people that can accept such leadership, and respond to such a call, is beyond the possibility of defeat.

tion with just the right economy of emphasis to make it clear that it was acting in the spirit of Churchill's own final appeal to let pre-war feuds die, personal quarrels be forgotten, and all hatreds kept for the common enemy. Its vote upheld the Government, but by a fraction of its normal majority.

Mr. Chamberlain understood the hint, and acted on it with the quiet dignity that never forsook him. He laid down his high office, making it clear that his only desire was to serve his country, and his successor, to the utmost of whatever power his age and failing health might leave him. Whereupon King George, accurately interpreting the sense of his people, instantly summoned Churchill to form a government that should be fully national in fact as well as name.

It was high time; for the very day that Churchill went to Buckingham Palace to take the seals of office, was that which Hitler had fixed for the launching of the real and Total War that the Western democracies had almost persuaded themselves might be postponed, until the fruits of automatic victory fell into their mouths. Early that morning the storm that had already submerged five\* innocent nations, had burst with unprecedented violence upon peaceful Holland and Belgium; and by the time, three days later, that Churchill had completed his ministry, it had become apparent to all men that neither of them was in any condition to stand the shock. It remained to be seen whether the combined British and French armies would be able to constitute the immovable obstacle to withstand this hitherto irresistible force. But the events of the past month had raised doubts even in the hardiest spirit:—doubts that were to be only too terribly confirmed before the week was out. Everyone had realized that Lloyd George, who knew something about war, had been telling no more than the truth in warning the country that it was in the worst strategical position it had ever occupied. Britain was—and she was beginning to realize it—faced with a deadlier and more imminent peril than any in her history. Total starvation for half of her people, Total enslavement of those who had the misfortune to survive, Total extinction of all those liberties and decencies of civilization for which she stood—that, and nothing less, would be the meaning of defeat in Total War. And the chances of defeat, though the word might never be breathed, were no longer to be ruled out on a realistic calculation. Seven nations had crumpled already at the first blow of the hammer, and if France were to make an eighth—as France might—would there be the same “assurance of victory” for the ninth on the programme?

It was a double testing time, for the nation and its leader; and each looked to the other with an equal confidence. Nevertheless it was not without a tinge of anxiety that we listened for his first words. Would he seek to raise our spirits by the sort of optimistic uplift that is almost the inevitable lead on such occasions? Or was it possible that he would credit us with a spirit as great as his own,

\* Seven, if you count Albania and Abyssinia.